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Concern for Creation

Voices on the Theology of Creation

ed. Viggo Mortensen



THE LUTHERAN
WORLD FEDERATION

Concern for Creation

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We sincerely hope that our readers will find pleasure and usefulness in this book.

Evah Ignestam, editor TRO & TANKE

Preface

TOWARDS A VIABLE THEOLOGY OF CREATION

Viggo Mortensen

Human beings are called to be responsible for and help preserve God's creation. Although this mandate is a fundamental Judeo-Christian theme it has, according to Mark Ellingsen¹, been largely overlooked until the last century.

In his book Ellingsen reviews various church bodies' statements that among other social issues deal with the ecology. Ellingsen concludes that the ecology is one of the areas in social ethics where despite the tendency to view theological agreements based on appeals to creation as leading to rather conservative positions, appeals to the doctrine of creation are made more often than in any other field of social ethics. The concern for the environment has rekindled both confidence and interest in the doctrine of creation.

It is a known fact that there are several problems associated with the doctrine of creation. How does the doctrine of creation relate to a modern, scientific description of the origin of the cosmos? How do creation and salvation relate to one another? Is the Christian doctrine of creation not inherently anthropocentric and thus inadequate when it comes to a modern understanding of the place of human beings in all there is?

1 Mark Ellingsen, *The Cutting Edge. How the Churches Speak on Social Issues*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1993, p. 41.

Obviously there are many problems related to the doctrine of creation some of which have troubled especially Lutherans as they have been inclined to interpret creation as an understanding of the created order (*Schoepfungsordnungen*).

Nevertheless, the pressing ecological and environmental problems make it desirable and even inevitable to overcome those difficulties. For our survival and salvation it is vital that we develop and sustain "a theology of nature" which can function both critically and as a source of vision and courage for the development of alternative conceptions of the relationship between God, humanity and nature."²

For an ecumenical theology the challenge of ecology has been very much present during the last twenty-five years. The crises of the earth and the human community such as they have come to our awareness in social and political life in general, have challenged the Christian community not only in a general way, but as a particular test of conscience: how have the Bible, Christian proclamation and the practice of Christians contributed to preventing or to promoting these predicaments? The accusation has been heard and has had to be taken seriously: not only has the testimony of Christians failed to arrest a fatal development but, in some ways, it has also obviously contributed to this flow of events.

Christian self-criticism and the quest for conversion have been expressed in various information and campaign activities of the local, national and regional churches, and in a series of ecumenical study projects and information programs on a global scale. In the theological curriculum there has generally been increased interest in the theology of creation, to a large extent a combination with challenging dialogues with the natural and social sciences. These initiatives together with a stronger political preoccupation with the threats to nature seem to have in many parts of the world contributed to an increasing demand for the preservation of the natural resources. However, the practical results of more life-preserving politics as well as of a more life-oriented lifestyle among Christians and among people in the so-called "Christian parts of the world" must be judged as modest, much too modest in the light of the exigencies set by the conditions for human survival.

60 In the Christian theology of creation there has until now been too strong a bias toward separating the various issues, thus tending on the one hand to separate faith in God the Creator from the concrete settings of nature, of society, of international order, of humanhood etc. and, on the other, to separate these areas of concern from each other in such a way as to lose sight of the global coherence of the challenge: the consumerist attitude to life strongly supported by modern marketing and media development being a powerful reminder of the basic character of sin: idolatry as the human beings' constant attempt to define the meaning of life in terms of possession.

Other weaknesses of the theology of creation so far may be a long established fear of a confrontation with natural science (stemming from traumas connected with collisions with the mechanistic world image anno sixteen hundred and with evolution

2 Douglas Jon Hall in, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1991, p. 249.

in the late nineteenth century), a certain spiritualistic tendency to reserve piety for the domain of "inner life", a biblicist trend to subject the vision of creation to that of "*Heilsgeschichte*", or — parallel to this — to some historicized concept of "liberation". Today it should be beyond discussion that the respect for creation as an ecologically given entity is indispensable for an obliging vision of the sustainability of nature. Likewise, the very idea of "human rights" as it emerged in the late eighteenth century was rooted in a firm idea of "nature" as a system of unshakable basic values, independent of the shifting flux of history.

A new, and ethically more operative theology of creation should in its basic orientation not be too narrowly linked with a preconceived draft of some theological program in general, but be open to draw on various theological concepts and on the historical contributions of different confessional traditions³.

Thus, the challenge arising from the ecological crisis has been on the Lutheran World Federation's agenda for some time. An international workshop on "A Concern for Creation" was held at Bossey, Switzerland in May 1994 and brought together a select group of theologians, LWF staff and representatives of other global confessional bodies. Papers were presented and following intensive discussion the group worked on a statement parts of which are included in this introduction.

In the following article I refer to this discussion and Per Lonning reminds us in his article of the valuable work previously undertaken by the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg. The papers contained in this book have come out of this ongoing study process with the aim of developing a viable theology of creation.

The Strasbourg study was entitled *Creation — An Ecumenical Challenge*, a very apt title considering the fact that all churches face this complex of problems.

Bernard Przewozny illustrates how the Roman Catholic Church has been struggling with these problems and discovered resources in our common heritage. Won Yong Ji points to the importance of wise stewardship and poses the question whether paradigms inspired by Eastern wisdom could be helpful. Elizabeth Bettenhausen and Grace N Ndyabahika point to radical new perspectives coming out of Christian feminism and many of their theses challenge traditional Christian teaching. This plurality of resources, including the astonishing information coming out of the sciences, influences our life and understanding. As Phil Hefner rightly states in his contribution, what we realize now is that the scientific concepts will not be

3 Excerpts from the draft statement of the working groups at an international workshop on "A Concern for Creation" organized by the Lutheran World Federation, held at Bossey, Switzerland in May 1994. Among those actively involved in formulating the statement were: Elizabeth Bettenhausen, Reinhard Brandt, N H Gregersen, Kjetil Hafstad, Phil Hefner, Heinrich Holze, Martin Ishoy, Scott Ickert, Won Yong Ji, Per Lonning, Gert Nilsson, Ricardo Pietrantonio and Vitor Westhelle.

barriers to the religious affirmation that nature can contain the possibilities of grace.

When we think about how this can fit together a certain notion from the biological sciences springs to mind: *bricolage*. This is the way evolution works. It takes what is at hand, registers the limits and makes things fit and purposeful. In the post-modern era theology can perhaps learn from this method and a variety of elements, including resources from classical theology, can be included in theological reflection.

Since this study process was initiated by the LWF it is only natural that many contributors to this publication have focused on the resources in our Lutheran heritage. Kjetil Hafstad reviews this century's controversies around creation theology in Lutheran theology and points to some common ground. Gert Nilsson emphasizes the interrelatedness of creation and salvation and creation and culture. Vitor Westhelle regards ecological responsibility as a doxological act of repentance and renewal, and discovers resources in Luther's theology to face evil in nature and society and to enable a practical response to the problems at hand.

Scott Ickert argues that there is an intimate connection between the sacraments and God's creation and N H Gregersen contributes to this argument by suggesting that resources can be found in Luther for the argument in favor of the sacramentality of nature.

A common picture seems to emerge out of this wide array of resources. A limited consensus could be reached on how to evaluate the state of the earth, the place of human beings and some remedies to the present predicament.

State of the earth, the place of humans

We live at a time in which for large sections of humanity the established vision of the earth and our own human place in it are splintering right before their eyes, like a mirror broken into many pieces. Previously we thought that we knew what the earth is and how to relate to it.

* We thought that the earth existed for our benefit: plants and animals for food; mineral resources for our imaginative use in manufacturing; natural beauty for our enhancement and recreation.

* We thought the earth was the playing field on which humans could limitlessly exercise their technological inventions and effectiveness.

* We thought our destiny was to grow as much as possible, to produce as many goods as possible, and to link peoples of the world in one materially prosperous human community.

These visions are being shattered before our very eyes. In large parts of the world, people have not entertained such visions; traditional ways of relating to the world have persisted or, have with little benefit often been dislocated by the technology of the industrial nations. The people of the earth are trapped in hunger, poverty, exploitation, overpopulation, violent conflict, deep ethnic divisions, racism, sexism, and other discriminatory fracturing. The natural ecosystems of the planet are losing their ability to sustain human community due to pollution, depletion, and unwise exploitation. Social frameworks and structures of stability and human togetherness have been broken down and mass-media are distorting human communication to a blunt article of sale. The trajectories that we are traveling today lead to violence, deep injustice and environmental collapse.

Over the last years it has become clear that all nations of the world perceive this interconnected network of crises to be a serious threat. There are differing perspectives on these crises, to be sure. Countries of the Northern hemisphere tend to focus on the ecology of the natural environment, whilst Southern countries underscore the economic basis of the crises. In some countries social and political threats take the limelight while for others, the threat to the natural environment is in the forefront. Some are beginning to see that the ecological threat jeopardizes culture and community as much as the biosphere, and that what is at stake in the contemporary consumer society is in the end human personhood as such. We have invented a society that lives from transforming the humanity of humans into the greed of beings who basically define themselves in terms of consumers. Increasingly, all peoples are beginning to recognize that our crisis is global and it threatens all of us, even if different nations stand in different relationships to the causes and consequences of the crisis.

It is also becoming clear that the human community must again ask the most basic questions, because it recognizes that it is confused at the most fundamental level.

What fundamentally is the earth? What is its meaning and what is it for? Where do human beings fit in with the earth and its vital processes? How do they fit in with each other? What are we here for? What are our responsibilities *vis à vis* the planet? What can we expect from the planet, and what does it require of us? What should be our basic understanding of the significance of the human community and in what sense do we stand in community with the earth and with ourselves as responsible persons? What is the nature of this community?

Just as it is our most cherished and long-established assumptions that are being shattered, we stand under the imperative to probe deeply in our reflection on the most fundamental issues and questions. We believe that the religious communities of our world bear resources within themselves relevant to humankind's situation today. We acknowledge that the Christian churches and in particular our Lutheran churches must also shoulder the heavy responsibility of thinking anew about these basic questions. We

recognize that we are not aloof from the present set of crises — we share their consequences, just as we share the responsibility for causing them.

Nevertheless, we also live in the hope and confidence that the revelation that we have received and to which we are accountable contains the wisdom of God and points to the active presence of God that can light our way and renew our ability to understand why we are on planet earth and what direction our actions on the planet should take.

Spiritual renewal

Creation is the most amazing and mysterious handiwork of the Triune God with meaning and purpose. We ask what the theological meaning and significance of nature in the light of the created act of God, then and now, are. Such a search may enhance a true Trinitarian theology and subsequently promote responsible action from our side by paying more and closer attention to the First Article of the Creed.

We are facing the crucial problem of the destruction of nature. Waste and misuse threaten nature, the source of our physical life. The root cause of this misbehavior is the endless greed of human beings. Is there no end to human greed? The answer is no! If we fail to control greed and desires, as our Buddhist neighbors have been telling us all along (cf. Jas 1:15 et al.) a so-called campaign for the "fair distribution of wealth" can only be a token gesture. A radical renewal of the structure of human consciousness, value systems as well as attitudinal changes in the area of morality and ethics are necessary. Human greed (concupiscence — the endless desire to get ever more for one's own pleasure and satisfaction, culminating in luxury) and the craving of the old "self" have no end. This suggests forcefully that a radical spiritual renewal is needed. We are confronted with a serious religious issue as well as a moral problem, a very difficult task in the spiritual climate of our time.

The root causes of this tragedy are among others greed and sin. Our radical Christian response to this destruction, forgiveness and being freed from guilt and sin, is a hopeful sign which can lead us to the meaningful life with joy and happiness that the Creator originally intended.

Different levels of action must be envisaged to sustain viable alternatives for a more meaningful life.

* We need a genuine *concern for the environment* — the external aspect, and a concern for human consciousness — internal and attitudinal aspects. This goal can be achieved by the cooperation of natural scientists, social scientists, environmentalists and developmentalists, religionists, theologians, and philosophers. Here one may add that the concern for the integrity of creation and the global problem of the ecological crisis are defi-

nately more of a religious and spiritual issue than a socioeconomic, scientific or political concern. All of us must cooperate.

* We need to *examine our value system*. Do the advanced ways of life with modern conveniences provide true happiness and satisfaction? What is happiness? We suggest to conscientize ourselves and others to do something for this inescapable complex problem of our generation that threatens the survival of earth and human beings by "developing" the petrified human mind, loveless hearts, and the "forest" of the endless human greed by challenging the sinful character of human luxury.

* We need to *develop some visible devices*: protect the earth and environment by law and with the help of the legal system and highly trained scientists reduce the pollution of the environment.

* Let us be *more positive and optimistic*, not fatalistic in the pessimistic context of life today. Let us encourage each other to have confidence and conviction in that the basic ingredients for solving the problem are to be found in the holy scripture. Let us be faithful to what we teach, i.e., the teaching of Jesus Christ, and practice it as earnestly as possible. Let us also remember that the teachings of Christ and the two thousand years old highly structured huge Christianity with literally hundreds of variations are not necessarily the same. There is no room for being in despair. With the hope in the Creator who is not only the Creator but also the Redeemer in Jesus Christ, and the Sustainer, we live with confidence and courage.

The theological issues

Resources from the biblical tradition

When we then approach the job of theological *bricolage*, we might not find the same level of consensus. A consensus was established regarding the awareness that when at a time of ecological crisis we in the Lutheran churches deal with the doctrine of God's creation then it is important that we take into account the richness of our tradition. The tradition provides us with many elements which can decisively determine our understanding of and dealing with creation. Allowing for tradition not only enables us to avoid old mistakes, but also to assess the dangers arising from putting a one-sided emphasis on certain points of doctrine.

The Triune God

It is the Triune God who is Creator. The Trinity is neither an intellectual puzzle nor a static doctrine, but the narrative of God's historical relationship with his creation. This narrative and history derive meaning and purpose from the end, signaled by Jesus' resurrection from the dead and the Father's sending of the Spirit. Thus God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, embraces the whole of created reality, including its time, past, present and future, in him who is the alpha and the omega. The confession of the Trinity, therefore, is an expression of faith in the gracious destiny of creation as God's act of love, despite natural disaster and decay, human frailty, sin and death.

Creation does not pertain to the First Article of the Creed only. God, who is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creates the world and all that exists, sustains it, and brings it to its final fulfillment. Neither must creation's origin be isolated from its completion and perfection. For the Father's original purpose and will for the creation is given and determined by the final fulfillment of the new creation, brought into existence by the Word made flesh in the power of the life-giving Spirit. Creation, therefore, is always a new and original work of the Spirit, eternally springing forth from the incarnate Word of God the Father. Consequently, one does not merely hope for the existing creation's persistence and survival, but for its ultimate, and therefore constant, re-creation.

In Word and sacraments, the specific history of Israel and the church, and the general history of all created beings, are given a common origin and a shared destiny in the Trinitarian life of God. For since the general creation maintains its integrity apart from the church, the hoped-for future of this creation will be realized in the Spirit only through the creative and redeeming Word of God. Thus, the meaning and purpose of the general creation are ultimately resolved in the historical outcome of Israel and the church.

Imago Dei

Since the crises that have dislocated us center so much on our human confusion of understanding the world and our human distortions of praxis, it is appropriate to begin our reflection with what our Christian faith reveals to us about ourselves. The central statement of our faith concerning humans and their meaning focuses on the biblical affirmation of the *imago Dei* — created in the image of God. This affirmation is so important it cannot be overlooked. This biblical statement has also been the source of great perversion and sin — because it has not been understood in its relational context. This context includes,

* The full theology of God's creation — the gift character of creation (*creatio ex nihilo*) and the ongoing gracious presence of God in creation (*creatio continua*).

* The immediate biblical setting, in which the *imago Dei* is pronounced upon a duo — man and woman, together constituting humanity.

* The bond with all of nature, the previous five days of creation in Genesis 1 and the union of earth and spirit in Genesis 2.

* The christological context. The prologue to the gospel of John and Colossians 1 place the Christ in creation, as does I Corinthians. The Christian tradition bears extensive witness to Jesus Christ as the defining paradigm of authentic humanity, the *imago Dei*.

Jesus Christ lived fully in this contextual web. The sermon on the mount bears witness to the personal and immediate relatedness of nature to God as freely and intentionally given creation. Jesus' earthly existence was constituted by his relations to the women and men in his own local setting — be they tax collector, prostitute, centurion or pharisee.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ demonstrated that his life was to be defined by his mutuality and self-giving for the life of the world in which he lived. Ministries of love and healing, resistance to evil, crucifixion and resurrection provide the primordial shape and substance of the fundamental humanity he articulated in his life — the substance of the *imago Dei* in which we are all created.

The first voice we hear from our tradition, therefore, is that the world around us is grounded in God's free intentionality of love, and that we have been created as ones who will devote themselves to the welfare of the world as Jesus Christ did — the life of relationality, of healing, of self-giving to the uttermost, of participation in resurrection and fulfillment.

Whatever direction one's praxis should take, it must be governed by this fundamental paradigm — the image of humanity created by God in the shape of Jesus Christ. Other elements from the biblical tradition help us to form this paradigm.

In the *doxologies*, such as the Psalms, God is praised for that which he has created. They describe in gratitude how creation is God's good gift to humankind. Furthermore, nature is admired in its relationship to God.

In the Old Testament God is thought of as one who acts in history. His action is not only rooted in the annual cycle of nature but goes beyond this and affects history. This claim also gained ground with regard to Greek mythology and thus revolutionized the understanding of time. The fact that throughout the centuries, until today, we talk about "progress", that we not only experience time but can measure it, can measure speed and

describe technical processes, is the result of a fundamental cultural decision.

In the prophetic tradition this linear understanding of time changed in the direction of an eschatology. At the same time an awareness was created that our world is finite, limited, and temporary. In their basic approach even modern astrophysical cosmologies pursue this tradition.

The view in old Israel can be summarized as follows:

- * God and creation are thought of as counterparts, God is transcendent.

- * Nature is interpreted as God's creation and thus loses its demonic, divine, and idolatrous character.

- * By recognizing nature as good creation, later attempts in Parsism, Gnosticism and Manichaeism to liberate the person from the prison of natural corporeality have remained unsuccessful.

- * Nature is thus a space in which the encounter with God becomes possible. This has been a recurring theme from the experience with God in Genesis 2 up to the theology of incarnation.

- * The human being is always referred to as an integral part of nature not as opposed to it. Nevertheless, the human being is described as having a special place and thus also a certain responsibility.

- * The history of creation shows that self-understanding, the understanding of God and the world is determined by deep rifts, sin and evil.

- * In the early stories God's faithfulness to his creation is recorded despite and in these rifts.

Resources from the Lutheran tradition

The biblical paradigm that the things of this world are indeed empowered by God to become vessels of grace has undergirded the Lutheran conviction. The Lutheran tradition has insisted that "the finite is capable of the infinite", that "nature is the realm of 'the masks of God' ", and that when understood in the light of God's promise, natural things are bearers of God's grace, even when masked in their opposite (*sub contraria specie*).

Therefore, to understand that humankind is created in the image of God entails a) the recognition of our createdness, b) the egalitarian and communal character of our state in the face of the Creator, c) the particular status of humans within creation, d) our consubstantiality with nature out of which humans are shaped, and e) our responsibility as co-laborers

(cultivators) in God's continuing creation. We recognize however that it is our predicament to have blurred this image by our sinful condition. The possibilities of the natural world, and the social structures devised by humans, live always under the reality of human sin and perversion. Nevertheless, in Jesus Christ, in his life, cross and resurrection we are enabled to envisage the profile of the image we were endowed with. Thus, Lutherans claim to be in continuity with the core of the ecumenical tradition and in consonance with the Protestant interpretation of it. The christological nucleus of the ecumenical tradition, as interpreted by the Lutheran confessions, entails the full humanity of God in Jesus in whom the divine self-revelation of God is manifest but attests with equal emphasis the omnipresence of God in the whole creation (*finitum capax infiniti*) with all its variety and diversity in and through which God is masked (*larvae Dei*).

In the present ecological crisis these masks are weeping. Hunger, poverty, oppression, pollution, sexism, racism, exploitation and depletion are the tears of God's masks that express the wrath of God in the pending judgment of those who have caused it calling for repentance. Nevertheless, it also reminds us of the cross of Christ to which we are drawn and through which the promise of Easter can already be celebrated. This means that we must discern the omnipresence of Christ's cross, as well as the incarnation, and that this cross is at one and the same time the expression of God's judgment and forgiveness for us, and the shape of our love for nature and its people.

In faithfulness to this heritage we also recognize that practical challenges, contextual circumstances and historical difference have constantly allowed and demanded pluralistic perspectives that have renewed and brought into a new and different light the very core of the Christian message that holds us together.

Under the cross of the suffering Christ we celebrate theological diversity in the recognition that it enriches the contextual relevance of our call to serve all creation and that through this diversity we are reminded that our particular perspective offers a vision of the image as if through a splinter of a mirror.

Faith and gospel

There are important trends in the Lutheran theological tradition that provide the basis for the church's orientation toward environment and nature. These traditions are not unanimous and need further investigation in the light of the present contextual development. In spite of these differences which are due to different cultural and historical situations there are viable and common elements in our tradition that encourage the churches all over the world to face the present critical development in environment and extra-human and human nature. Such elements are:

The givenness of our fundamental joy and distress sets us free to receive our lives from the Creator and participate in His plan for humankind and nature. It is an important task to investigate how our basic experiences — which are there even before we start to reflect on their nature — bear witness to the Creator's goodness. Confidence, joy, compassion for other humans and for nature are given to us even before we think, and are basic elements in God's good creatures, which ontologically are prior to mistrust, desperation, and cruelty.

The fact that life and the environment are given to us, opens our eyes to God's acts in nature and history and imposes respect for and humility *vis à vis* all elements in natural life.

In the light of faith nature is ambiguous, rich in grace and mercy, but also in cruelty and destruction. Luther experienced the created world as a good gift, but underlined that the goodness may be corrupted by humankind. An example is sexuality. No one chooses to be male or female, but is given the gift and burden of sexuality with its potential to bring forth coming generations. This potential is combined with pleasure, but the devil can corrupt this good with suspicion, jealousy etc. The elementary experience of the good nature inspires us to protect and respect this side and take a stand against destruction. Such actions are further motivated by Christian faith, which sees God as Creator and Redeemer. Nevertheless, the task is common to every human. Christians may have a special inspiration but have no special knowledge of how to protect and sustain nature and humanity. This state of affairs urges the church to reflect further on the difference and relation between creation and redemption.

Life as an unexpected gift

* Life is a gift of God the Creator. Far from being a matter of course, life is an unexpected wonder. Not only our being is given us by God but also the multicolored and manifold world of natural forms in which we are embedded. God's wisdom is "multicolored" (*polypoikilos*, Eph 3:10). In the wisdom of God's Word, God has chosen to create a world which is allowed to co-shape its history on this planet. In the continuous creation, God lets the earth bring forward vegetation with "plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit ..." (Gen 1:11). In the same way, God blesses the living animals with the promise: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth!" (Gen 1:22).

* Arisen out of the soil through a long history of nature, we are created as children of the earth. Like Adam's stemming from the dust and dirt of the soil we are and remain natural creatures, also in our cultural and technological abilities. Seen from this perspective, each human being is born in the image of nature (*imago mundi*). It is God's intention that we actively

take part in an intense but balanced interaction between ourselves and our fellow creatures. This imposes restrictions on the way we develop and use our technology; but the will of God the Creator also encourages us to seek the most intense reciprocal interactions with nonhuman nature.

* The human community of men and women has been gifted with capacities besides those we share with our fellow animals. Yet special gifts imply special responsibilities. Constituted in the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*), God constantly calls upon the human community to partake in the process of turning nature into crystals of God that mirror the Christ-in-all. For Jesus Christ, the only true and full image of God, in his very being and acting united heaven and earth (Col 1:15f). It is as a community of sisters and brothers, "men and women" (Gen 1:28) that humans are born to be the images of God. Nevertheless, only by extending the community to include the biological world in its integrity, and by serving and taking care of the diversity and multiplicity of biological life, we live according to God's multicolored wisdom. Human beings are called to be the voice of nature from which they have arisen.

* As long as the human community only perceives the world in its own picture (*imago sui*), it falls behind its destiny, and lives in discordance with God and with fellow creatures. The churches realize in sobriety and repentance that this is the state of sin human culture performs in this historical epoch of ecological crisis. Human cultures, especially the industrialized cultures, have broken the long history of a fruitful and balanced interaction between human and nonhuman nature. Instead of being the voice of God's creation, we defame the voice of nature in our actions and attitudes of greed. The churches now realize that the gifts of creation cannot be taken for granted. Human sinfulness has threatened the integrity of both the biological world and true humanity. For we are only true human beings by being more than anthropocentric, by realizing and appreciating the interrelatedness of human existence with nonhuman nature under the one God, Creator of all that is.

* The Lutheran churches realize that the traces of God in creation are ambiguous. This situation elicits new aspects of the traditional Lutheran view of the relationship between God and humanity. As the transcendent God, the loving and caring God has defined God's place to be for always in every inch of the vast, expanding universe. Nevertheless, God is not unambiguously manifest everywhere in the cosmos. Violence among humans and the exploitation of nature manifest human greed but not the will of God. Thus we realize that without the unambiguous Word of God's embracing grace, we are left without the only voice that reveals God. Yet Christ, the Word of God, reveals the God whom we also meet outside the doors of the churches, anonymously working in and through the masks of creation.

Seen in the light of Christ, we discern that even before we are baptized, we are born to be members of God's covenant with every living creature on the planet earth (Gen 9). Yet, when we were still enemies of God (Rom 5:10), the eternal Son of God — Light of Light — was sent to be incarnated in the flesh and blood of human nature. Christ suffered thirst and hunger like every living creature, plant, animal or human; he was tempted as every human being, and he died the death of animals, humans, slaves and the socially discarded. What does the history of incarnation and the event of cross mean for a theology of creation?

* The incarnation means that God values nature for its own sake. In the love of God, God respects nature as nature without transforming it to something different to what it is: God's own creation. "He came to what was his own..." (Jn 1:11). Thus, the world of creation is the resting place, but nature is not an idol of God. "He was in the world..." (Jn 1:10) but he was not the world. God loves the world in its integrity of nature and human culture. The incarnation also means that God is to be encountered in the miniatures of daily social life taking place in the midst of the natural world. The incarnation is a message of joy and excess: God is already here! God is not to be searched for in the heavens but on the earth. The cross of Christ, in its unity with the message of God's overcoming of evil and death, is the fulfillment of God's incarnation. God's place is even in the lowliest and darkest corners of natural existence: in death, pain and dread. On the cross, God affirms God's own creation at the point where human aspirations have to come to an end and human beings are unveiled and naked, like on the first day of their creation. In the same way, the cross is God's "No" to the sinful powers of the fall by which human beings have tried to construct the world in their own image and likeness. The *crux probat omnia* means that the cross is the exclusive criterion for revealing the God whom we already encounter in the vessels of creation. In this sense, the crucified Christ is the window that manifests the inclusive nature of the God who is omnipresent everywhere in creation, and who may even be present as grace in the vessels of creation. The crucifixion is a unique historical event of reconciliation between God and the world. Nevertheless, the cross reveals the God who wants to give God's own life for the benefit of others.

* The sacraments foreshadow God's new creation as the gracious work of the Father, in Christ, through the Spirit. The sacraments manifest the sustaining and redeeming work of the Creator through the Word, and by virtue of the Word, become effective signs of hope for a crises-plagued creation. The human community is free to act toward a beleaguered creation in light of this promise that the sacraments epitomize. The sacraments use and interpret created reality, therefore, from faith in God's Word, in view of creation's promised perfection. The sacraments are thus a celebra-

tion of God's new creation, whereby in the Word made flesh, and through the Spirit, creation is made holy.

* Baptism is an unambiguous promise of God's will of grace, mediated through the created elements of the water of nature and the simple voice of a human preacher. In the same way, the eucharist is an event where God unambiguously imparts God's grace to the believers through the elements of bread and wine — a co-product of nature and culture — and the word and voice of a human preacher. Both of the sacraments show that God is not only present in the natural world. God even sometimes uses nature as a means of imparting grace. Creation is not only a forum of sin but is also — whenever it pleases God — a forum of grace. Drawing attention to the eucharistic vision of the natural world may be one of the contributions of the Lutheran churches to the ecumenical restatement of a theology of creation. In his reflections on the meaning of the real presence of Christ, Luther time and again pointed to the correlation between the wonder of the real presence of Christ in the mundane bread and wine and the neglected wonders in the world of creation. The experiences in the world of creation not only correspond but also reflect the presence of God's gracious Word in creation. According to Luther, there is only one sacrament, Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, from which both baptism and eucharist derive their name of "sacraments". We acknowledge that it is with reason that the Latin word *sacramentum* is derived from the Greek term *mysterion*. The church praises and tries to grasp "the breath and length and the height and depth and to know the love of Christ" though it is "beyond knowledge" (Eph 3:18f). We know of the secret purpose of God (Eph 1:9) but are not able to trace the hidden way of God's grace in the ambiguous world. However, we dare to point to some unavoidable consequences of the eucharistic vision for the natural world: First, the sacramental view of nature shows the possibilities of matter in the presence of God's Word of grace. *Finitum capax infiniti!* Second, it discloses the possibility that God may use natural events outside the churches as the crystals of God's embracing grace. The church acknowledges this possibility of Christ's grace-imparting activity in the world, also outside the preaching of the gospel in the framework of the church. For we are called to be servants of the Word, and not its masters.

However, the possibility of nature as bearer of the Word of grace is not actualized through the inherent possibilities of nature as nature, but only in the presence of God's saving will that is made efficient only when and where it pleases God. For it is not nature itself but God's use of nature that turns natural events into efficient signs of God's healing work in creation. Therefore, the crucified Christ remains the ultimate criterion for discerning the spirits. The spirit of the Triune God is always cruciform.

FROM A LIBERATED TO A RECONSTRUCTED CREATION

Viggo Mortensen

The Curitiba message and its interpretation

Since the Assembly sets the mandate for the Federation's work for the period between Assemblies, the Federation, in theory, only exists during that period. At the Eighth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation meeting in 1990, in Curitiba, Brazil, delegates representing more than 100 Lutheran churches adopted a message that is to guide the work of the Federation until the next Assembly to be held in 1997, in Hong Kong, China.

Under the heading a liberated creation we read,

We hear the cries from creation as a chorus of anguish. The future of the earth is threatened. There is an increasing awareness everywhere of growing ecological crisis. In all regions of the world we observe the destruction of the environment.

The ozone layer is threatened, and without its protection all life is endangered. The "greenhouse effect" is changing the climate of the earth and these changes could be more devastating than nuclear war. The rain forests are being destroyed in the Amazon area and in Asia and Africa. There are alarming estimates about the rate of the extinction of the species. The effects of acid rain in industrialized countries and the indiscriminate use of pesticides are appalling.

Some look to genetic engineering to meet basic needs for sufficient food, others are convinced that genetic manipulation is an insult to the sacredness of life.

Social catastrophes are arising from the disturbance of the ecological environment. Urbanization and problems of overpopulation lead to transmigrations, which cause further ecological and social problems. In highly industrialized countries an excessive and wasteful use of the natural resources of our earth jeopardizes the long-term supply of basic needs for everyone — the consumption of fossil fuels by millions of cars is an example.

Ecological and economic problems are interrelated. There are tensions between economic growth and ecological sustainability. The Itaipu dam is an example: it

produces needed electricity for Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. However, it has destroyed the local environment, flooding forests and farmland, and has driven local people from their land to already crowded cities or the "new frontier" in the Amazon area.

The interrelatedness of the total ecosystem calls for answers to these cries that cannot come simply from technology. There is need for a new set of values and for a re-discovery of the spiritual dimension of human life on earth.

Christians believe in God as creator, redeemer and sustainer of life. God created the earth a place of joy and beauty. Humankind is created in the image of God who is "the friend of life" (Wisdom of Solomon), but for centuries we have emphasized the submission of nature to human domination. Sin and the powers of destruction have brought humanity to the point of forsaking its calling to be a guardian and steward and becoming instead a destroyer. It is now time to recapture the biblical understanding that we are created with beneficial power to care for community and establish relationships for peace among creatures.

There are an inseparable relationship and interdependence between humanity and creation as a whole, for survival as well as for salvation. We believe "that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21).

In Christ the new humanity and world to come begin (Col 1:15-23). This is celebrated wherever a person is baptized. According to long practice the church should baptize in pure unpolluted water, a symbol of "the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God" (Rev 22:1). The water of baptism is a reminder of God's promise and affirms our commitment to the preservation of nature. But now in many parts of the world it is no longer possible to find unpolluted water.

Similarly, in the Eucharist the fruits of the earth are brought to the table. Bread baked from the harvest of the fields, wine ripened on sunny slopes symbolize all that we need to live even as they bring us the very body and blood of Christ. With prayer and thanksgiving we receive what the creator gives as free gifts, the blessings of our labor, reminding us that all our life is dependent on soil, on sun, on water and air. But now it is often difficult to find bread and wine not contaminated by chemicals.

The church is also a part of God's creation. It proclaims the goodness and beauty of life and yet at the same time it take part in decisions and actions which threaten creation. Thus, we are both perpetrators and victims of environmental destruction. This is our partnership in the sin of humankind. We confess our sin that we have not been faithful stewards of God's creation.

In Jesus Christ, however, there is hope for a new beginning. Open to the future, the church is an agent for the hope that encompasses a new heaven and a new earth. Faithful in its stewardship to the creation, the church and its members should be dedicated to modesty in lifestyle and organizational structures.

The church has a unique opportunity to witness to the unity of God's world as it celebrates in liturgy and festival the goodness and beauty of creation and expresses gratitude for those who work to preserve it. At the same time it is part of the church's task to lift a prophetic voice in society when God's creation is endangered

and to participate in political struggles and decision-making processes where the fate not only of the present world, but also of the life conditions of future generations are at stake.

Together with people of other faiths and ideologies who struggle for the same goal, the churches should advocate the use of existing laws as well as new legislation and utilize non-violent action and civil disobedience in striving to protect all life. The churches should always be open to cooperation with governmental, non-governmental and independent organizations and political parties committed to this issue and take sides with groups and programs dedicated to an environmentally sustainable society, such as those who sponsor "Earth Day."¹

Thus the churches subscribed to the formation of one global lifeline that is to underpin their common efforts as they confront the threats to God's creation. The Federation commits itself to the ongoing ecumenical conciliar process for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation as well as to defending the Amazon region against ecological, social and economic destruction.

It is to be hoped that the Federation's Geneva Secretariat has helped its member churches to fulfill these commitments. In this text reference is made to several items on the agenda of the ecumenical discussion on the environment.

Interrelatedness is a key word. There is growing awareness that the problems are interdependent or, in other words, that there is not one single reason for the present ecological and environmental problems. It is a combination of various factors of which *modern science and technology*, the myth of *unlimited economic growth*, *over-consumption* and *population growth* are mentioned most frequently.

As mentioned above, the population explosion plays a decisive role in the present crisis. Despite the fact that this issue is a taboo subject in some cultures it needs to be addressed, also by the churches which, on their part, have not always contributed to promoting sound sexual ethics.

Another key-factor is the over-consumption in the wealthy nations. A change in lifestyle in the industrialized countries can no longer be avoided. Since this will not necessarily take place voluntarily, it is up to the different confessions to bring about the moral and spiritual climate conducive to such a change. Furthermore, new economic models which take into account that there are indeed limits to growth need to be developed.

Those working in the fields of science and technology should be encouraged to set goals that are more environment friendly. When it comes to applied technology small is still beautiful.

1 I Have Heard The Cry Of My People, Curitiba 1990, Proceedings of the Eighth Assembly, Lutheran World Federation, LWF Report, No 28/29, December 1990, pp. 88f.

The entire concept of development needs to be reevaluated. If we were seriously to apply the concept of sustainability to development it would result in a radical shift in the whole idea of development.

Development cannot be sustainable if the so-called developing countries are held in the bondage of debt. Thus, the debt crisis must be addressed and arrangements be made to start afresh.

Since there is an *interrelatedness between environment and development* a presupposition of a theological anthropological nature, which asserts an *interrelatedness of God and human beings*, can be found in the Curitiba message.

The reverence of life is central to Christianity, for life and its mysterious source are holy. A demand grows out of the gift of life, namely, that we take care of that which is entrusted to us. Christians are bound to neighborly love which includes the promise to improve the lives of others.

This interrelatedness is expressed in different ways. The biblical notion of humans being created in the image of God is one of the most creative images. Throughout the history of Christianity, this concept has been used to justify humanity's exploitation of nature. Sin and the powers of destruction have brought humanity to the point of forsaking its calling to be nature's guardians and stewards and have instead led to its becoming a destroyer. The time has come to recapture the biblical understanding of having been created with beneficial powers to care for community and to establish peaceful relationships among creatures. As stated in the Curitiba Message, there are an inseparable relationship and interdependence between humanity and creation, both with regard to survival and to salvation.

The church has to confess its guilt. In the name of God this correlation between God, humankind and nature has often been denied and perverted. We must repent that Christianity has been used to justify exploitation and degradation. Nevertheless, Christianity is not only a part of the problem but also a part of the solution.

If Christianity is rightly understood one can find in it the elements necessary to come to a new understanding of nature, including our own nature. The concept of creation affirms our affinity with everything there is, the universe, the cosmic elements and nonhuman nature.

Out of the reverence for life grows an understanding of the intrinsic value of all there is. This value must be respected in accordance with the contribution of the different elements to the common good.

Out of the demand for neighborly love grows a respect for the value and the rights accorded to everything. The understanding that certain rights are bestowed on everything according to its inherent nature needs to be strengthened. It is, for instance, neither fair nor just that a few generations consume the earth's heritage of metals and fossil fuels, a gift from the dying stars and untold animal and plant lives. Also coming generations have a right not merely to be born but, also, to have their fair share of the earth's

treasures. It is our duty to cease stealing from future generations and from nature that which cannot be renewed. We violate our dignity as human beings if we take what does not belong to us but to future generations.

Religions and churches should build the spiritual horizon. It must be obvious that the universe is our source and home and commands our veneration and respect.

The earth will not regain its vitality unless we acknowledge our kindred to all peoples, our close relationship to all living things and the entire universe. This kinship infers responsibility for everyone and everything according to understanding and ability.

From an apologetic to a sacramental approach

With regard to environmental ethics, I believe that the Curitiba Message attempts to formulate what one might describe as an ecumenical consensus. However, this consensus glosses over certain discrepancies. As already indicated there is no real consensus regarding the ultimate cause of the ecological crisis. Thus one discusses whether it is the excessive use of technology that is to blame, which is why "small is beautiful" [Schumacher]; whether it is economic growth, which is why one should set "limits to growth" [Club of Rome]; whether it is merely over-consumption which can be solved by better, more effective distribution ["There is enough for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed"]; or, whether it is population growth, which generally means that somebody else should have fewer children.

Even if we believe, as indeed I do, that there is some truth to all these explanations, we might sometimes end up in situations where we must make some very basic choices. The preceding analysis affects these choices.

Confronted with the ecological crisis, theology has reacted in a number of ways.

The first approach could be called the *apologetic approach*. Here one tries to show that there is an adequate basis for a Christian response to the environmental crisis both in the scriptures and tradition. This perspective has led to an interesting new interpretation of both scripture and tradition. In its most simplistic form it does little more than recite biblical passages that declare creation to be God's handiwork. But, on a more erudite level, it uses the themes of incarnation and creation as theological guarantees for an ecological theology and picks up environmentally sound passages from different Christian writings.

Normally, this apologetic approach ends up underscoring the biblical themes of dominion and stewardship.

The Bible deals primarily with humankind's creation and salvation, and nature figures only in relation to these main issues. This applies, for example, to the account of the creation. Here the main point is not what was created, but that it is God who creates and maintains it. To emphasize this

idea, it has often been said that biblical creation was *creatio ex nihilo*; clearly a point of view that emphasizes the majesty of God. Nothing can be next to God, even if it is merely material which God could use in the act of creation because where could it have come from? The notion of creation from nothing can be difficult to document in the texts where God is often seen as creating order from chaos. Because that happened, there came new things: light, heaven, land and sea, sun, moon and stars, fish and birds, the other animals and, finally, humankind, to follow the order in the first account of creation. The refrain is important: and saw that it was very good. Everything. There is no mention of evil matter which one must repress or escape from. In this creation, the human being, created in the image of God, has her/his special place expressed in the words that she or he must rule carefully. The special place can be seen, for example, in that the human being is the place where nature comes to words. The fact that nature receives language in the human being means that the hills and mountains, beasts and flowers have something to tell us that we can give expression to if we only listened to it. The human being is seen as standing in an intermediate position: under God, together with fellow human beings, but above the rest of nature (Ps 8). Clearly there is a demythologizing tendency in this way of looking at things. According to the mythological view of reality, natural phenomena have souls, are personal subjects or gods. Against the background of these two lines of thought we can see in the Old Testament the beginning of the demythologized view of nature typical of the modern Western relationship to nature. It is the notion of one God (monotheism) and the notion of God as beyond the world (transcendence). Hereafter no part of the world can be God. Created by God it is something other than Him, it is worldly. It is also said that the human being is created in God's image, which, among other things, must imply a resemblance. Hence, humankind is not completely separate from the divine. As an extension of this the Christian tradition contains the notion of the human being as steward. There is little guidance as to how this stewardship should be carried out. Nevertheless, one can infer something from the analogy which can be drawn between the relationships: God — human being — nature. Just as saying that the human being is created in God's image expresses an equality between human beings and God, there is also a parity between humankind and nature in that both are created. Just as the entire creation is acknowledged as being good it is also the entire creation which will ultimately be saved.

In brief, the notion of stewardship includes five points:

- * the human being has a higher value than nature;
- * the human being has the right to rule over nature;
- * nature is a resource for human kind;
- * humankind is responsible for nature;
- * nature should be managed carefully by humankind.

The five points above are open for discussion and might be in need of clarification. Nevertheless, because of this notion of stewardship one can speak of humankind's responsibility for the threatened creation. The basis for this is the presupposition that nature is inferior to humankind. If one sees this as the reason for our exploitative and dominant attitude towards nature, then one must move in the direction of models that deal with nature's own independent value.

This approach is called apologetic because it defends the integrity of biblical religion and traditional theology: essentially Christianity is ok. Although there have been perversions these can be corrected. It is easy to mobilize a great deal of sympathy for this type of approach and it turns our attention to significant resources in Christian classics. Furthermore, analyzing the historical roots of the environmental crisis facilitates a more differentiated understanding of this very complex issue. This is important since there has been a tendency to see Christianity as the major, even sole cause of the environmental crisis.

The problem is that it is questionable whether this approach goes far enough in opening Christianity up to the challenge of the ecological crisis. In the attempt to go further one can distinguish between several positions.

One would be the sacramental approach that focuses on the allegedly sacred qualities of the cosmos itself and, at times, tries to acknowledge the revelatory character of nature. Within these parameters one will find different forms of natural theology, from cosmic spirituality over deep ecology to other egalitarian forms of thinking about the relationship between humankind and nature.

In bio-centrism or deep ecology one attempts to see humankind as being completely immersed in nature. This follows the observation in ecology that life unfolds in systems. Here one attempts to establish holistic notions, based on the hypothesis that the whole is greater than its parts. Indeed, the parts in themselves do not exist at all, but can only be seen properly within the whole. One must primarily focus on these ever more comprehensive wholes. Holism is in turn dependent on a notion of harmony. While in Darwinism we find the concept of the battle for the survival of the fittest, the idea underlying ecology is that the different parts of the whole work together resulting in an ecological balance.

In this connection, diversity is central. Starting from the observation that diversity in a given system's potential contributes to its survival, one reaches the conclusion that diversity in itself is a positive value. Nevertheless, the human being is the factor of uncertainty determining which diversities ought to be preferred. Humankind has made being unspecialized its speciality. Thus, it is not a question of determining precisely the ecological niche to which the human being is suited. His or her biological mark of distinction is his or her adaptability. Therefore, although in deep ecology one denies the domination of humankind over nature and one believes all forms of life to have an intrinsic value one still admits in practice that this

intrinsic value is not absolute. Thus, one generally operates with a hierarchy of values in which humankind is given a preferential position.

Deep ecology can provide fertile soil for more radical forms of action regarding the question of the protection of nature. A group such as "Earth First" does not hold back from drastic methods when it comes to defending the environment. Defying those who accuse him of environmental sabotage, David Foreman says that it is not terrorism or vandalism, but rather a way of worshiping mother earth.

At the root of this radical environmental movement is a philosophy called bio-centrism or deep ecology. Fundamentally it claims that all life on earth has the right to exist, and that humankind does not have the right to destroy, or dominate, other forms of life. Many small groups follow this philosophy and are not afraid to use violence to advance their cause. These associations believe that they must use drastic measures to fight against what they regard as being the extremism of big business. They are critical of mainstream environmental organizations that they feel have become as rigid and bureaucratic as the system they are monitoring. On the other hand, the radical groups are unpopular with the more mainstream groups that feel that radical forms of action hinder real progress. Some do not hesitate to use the term eco-fascism. If one were to regard the human being as a mere tumor on the face of the earth, and were always to put the "earth first," most people would say that things had gone too far.

In his epochal work the grandfather of bio-centrism, Aldo Leopold, put "the land," the "biotic community" at the center, so that it is seen as having rights: "A thing is right when it tends to promote the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."² From here it is only a short step to a quasi religious worship of the cosmos. Today, we find different outlooks on life, some of the new religious kind. They take their point of departure in the biocentrist outlook, for example, the consciousness of Gaia, that is brought forward symbolically.

Not quite as radical are the groups that drag environmental offenders through the courts. The philosophy behind these court cases is that one must constantly be at the heels of the administrative system; partly, because the system reacts arrogantly, and partly because it is generally tied to the political and industrial system. Hence, the legal strategy becomes a form of political action. The more philosophical questions are difficult to address in a court of law, but there are some interesting examples. Thus, the attempt to expand the concept of "legal standing" is possibly a very promising form of action in the environmental movement.³

2 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, New York, 1949, pp. 224f.

3 cf. Christopher D Stones' very influential book, *Should Trees have Standing? Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects*, Los Altos, W Kaufmann, 1974.

We are here dealing with ecological alarmists who do not wish to abandon humankind. Out of respect for nature they wish to protect it as it is. Nature must continue to be nature, in the way we found it and in the way we know it. For that to succeed, more is required than control of the market and the economic system. Humankind is nature, surrounded by nature. When we change the surrounding nature, for example with biotechnology, we must also change humankind. If we want to retain our identity unchanged, we must find methods and lifestyles that are more in harmony with nature and less invasive.

From a Christian perspective, adhering to the notion of complete equality between humankind and nature is rather difficult. Just as in cosmology one speaks of the strong and the weak anthropic principle, within Christianity's relation to nature one can speak of a strong and a weak anthropocentric principle. The strong anthropocentric principle leads to an attitude of dominion over and profiting from nature. The weak anthropocentric principle upholds the vision of humankind's special place in nature.

A sacramental approach has been recommended in order to mediate between those options. In its typical form the sacramental approach interprets the natural world as the primary symbolic disclosure of God. Although religious texts and traditions are important, the cosmos in itself is the primary medium for the sacred. Holistic and organismic modes of thought are used to express that cultures and religions are simply natural extensions of cosmic processes.

This leads to a creation centered theology and re-cosmologizing of traditional Christian teachings, such as sin, revelation and Christ, and culminates in an ecological understanding of God. The Trinitarian concept of God is interpreted as the supreme exemplification of ecology as it deals with relations and this in turn then leads to a new spirituality.

The Lutheran communion and the sacramental approach

An especially "Lutheran" version of the sacramental approach came before the Council of the LWF at its meeting in Madras, India, in 1992. In a proposed statement meant as a follow up to the UNCED meeting in Rio de Janeiro it was stated that,

In response to the present crisis, we of the Lutheran communion are called to recover the confessional insight into the sacramental character of creation itself. This is the affirmation that all things in creation, in both nature and history, can be bearers of divine presence.

The Lutheran claim that the finite world can bear the infinite (*finite capax infiniti*), is not only testimony of the Real Presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the sacrament; it affirms that God can be encountered in the most lowly things of life.

Because all things participate in the essential unity of God's world, therefore, we do not accept the artificial separation between the physical and the spiritual, flesh and spirit, nature and super-nature, secular and sacred.

For Lutherans all of creation, whether trees or stones in the natural world or events and people in history, can be the masks of God (*larvae Dei*) which conceal the unapproachable light of the divine majesty and yet reveal, as "through a glass darkly" the presence of God. The created world is not simply to be passed over in mystical escape or used as a point of departure for reaching a supernatural realm; rather the creation itself, in all its dimensions, is to be taken with radical seriousness. We are ourselves part of creation and are called to love the world, even as "God so loved the world" (Jn 3:16).

Humankind has not been faithful to the biblical confession that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it," (Ps 24:1). The command to "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen 1:28) has been misinterpreted to mean domination over creation. The fruits of the earth have not been shared equitably with all as signs of God's gracious love. Through over-consumption many have been prevented from receiving the basic necessities of life. Selfish misuse of creation has contributed to the present crisis which threatens the earth.

Because of Christ we know that the "groaning" of creation is not a sign of impending doom, but rather an expression of the hope that new life will be born. We know that the God who creates is the same God who redeems. In a broken and sinful world we are to live and act in joyful anticipation of the liberation to come. "But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2 Pet 3:13).

Through the light of God's grace in Christ, all people have been freed from the need to justify themselves through achievement, consumption accumulation and domination. In the style of our daily living, the way we eat and drink, work and play, we are committed to follow Christ who took "the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7) and to present our bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1).

As a communion of Lutheran churches, we are determined, furthermore, through programs of worship, study and action, to contribute the gifts and talents entrusted to us, including the resources of our confessional heritage, in order to address the present crisis which threatens the future of the earth and its people.

The Council could not agree on this statement and thus as an organization we were left somewhat in the dark regarding how to approach this question. In this respect we share the fate of the World Council of Churches whose program on justice, peace, and the integrity of creation ground to a halt due to a lack of consensus concerning the definition of some key concepts.

The question is whether the apologetic, anthropocentrically weak approach is basic enough to constitute the backbone of the Christian response to the ecological crisis? Or, should more attention be paid to the sacramental approach? How far can Christianity go in the egalitarian biocentric direction without violating basic Christian teaching?

The protological-eschatological approach

The way forward must be to find a middle course between the two. We might call it the *protological-eschatological* approach, thus indicating that we want to draw upon resources from all three articles of the creed here. What follows are a few sketchy remarks which give some idea of the direction of my present line of thinking.

In K E Løgstrup's metaphysics of perception it is said that through our senses we have an immediate approach to the phenomena. An attitude marked by respect and reverence of all that is can grow out of that. In turn this is interpreted in the Christian notion of creation (protology); with the notion of the cosmos being our source and not only our environment, the universe and nature are brought back to the center of theology. A valuable resource from the second article is the notion of the cosmic Christ, and the accompaniment of all things created which grows out of that. Another element of an environmentally sensitive Christian vision is the eschatological dimension of Christianity that reaffirms God's promise and fidelity.

The eschatological passages (i.e., Rev 21, Isa 11) are precisely that: visions. Sometimes they are treated as rational, descriptive assertions which can cause some unclarity. As visions of a new creation devoid of all the ills and sufferings that are part and parcel of creation as we know it, they can inspire human beings to strive for a more just society and to engage in a struggle for a new and a renewed creation. God's promise is embedded in these visions. Reality is saturated with promise and the authentic life of faith is one of looking to the fulfillment of God's promise. The world of nature with all its ambiguities is, in the eyes of faith, pregnant with hints of future fulfillment. Nature is both source and promise. As such, it deserves neither neglect nor worship, but simply the kind of care appropriate to the treasuring of a promise.

A reconstructed creation?

In recent African theology there has been a noticeable shift in the theological metaphors from liberation to reconstruction.⁴ Can this be an inspiration for a new thinking within theology's contribution to a renewed environmental ethics?

The Bible not only gives thanks for the present creation, but it also seeks to change it. It looks forward, stating that as it is now it need not be forever. It acknowledges the imperfection of the present state of creation and seeks to reshape the world. Hopefully, to create it more in conformity

⁴ cf., José B Chipenda et al, *The Church of Africa. Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, All African Council of Churches, Nairobi, 1991.

with the vision of the future. The Bible includes the entire cosmos in its vision of the future: Rom 8:18-25.

In the notion of creation we interpret the fact that we experience nature as a gift. However, from experience we also know that nature is imperfect, indifferent and ugly. The protological aspect of nature therefore needs to be complemented with an eschatological perspective. The perspective of hope allows us to be realistic about what nature is. "We can accept the fact that cosmos is not paradise, but only the promise thereof ... Understanding the cosmos as a promise invites us to cherish it without denying its ambiguity."⁵

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When in the early 80s Washington's *Environmental Action* led to exploring significant a future study on Creation – the *Environmental Challenge*, applied ethical analysis are located in the *Environmental Ethics* and *Environmental Management* fields, it is a topic which applied the discipline. Looking at it with the eye of an ecologist or a documentalist, one can see an environmental management searching for and identifying *Environmental Ethics* problems. There had been some. The fact that this subject remained so little studied was the least likely, may be due to the fact that the development of the last decade has resulted in the number of the subject of work.

As for the philosophical dimension of the subject, the time before the 1980s was a time of environmental ethics – a period of environmental ethics, which of exploring an environmental ethics and management as a way of understanding their general differences. In the 1980s, environmental ethics was mostly for legal issues, which led to environmental ethics of management. The issue of the environmental ethics was not a subject of study because a lot of environmental ethics, which had been developed in the 1980s, had been a reflection of a situation which had led to environmental ethics. In the 1980s, the environmental ethics was not a subject of study because a lot of environmental ethics, which had been developed in the 1980s, had been a reflection of a situation which had led to environmental ethics. In the 1980s, the environmental ethics was not a subject of study because a lot of environmental ethics, which had been developed in the 1980s, had been a reflection of a situation which had led to environmental ethics.

CREATION — HOW IT BECAME AN ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE

Per Lønning

I.

When in the early 80s the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg signalized a major study on *Creation — An Ecumenical Challenge?*, several critical voices were heard: For fifteen hundred years creation was never an ecumenical issue, i.e., a topic which divided the church. Launching it as a theme in an ecumenical discussion could have rather un-ecumenical repercussions, searching for and allocating disagreement where previously there had been none. The fact that this kind of statement will hardly ever be heard today may be due to the theological development in the last decade but, certainly, also to the outcome of the project as such.

As far as the ecumenical division is concerned, the idea behind the project was not so much one of uncovering a new field of possible controversy but, rather, of exploring an area of obvious non-controversy as the key to concluding how general differences in the theological orientation may successfully be kept under control by some overarching vision of unity. Because of its non-church-dividing character, creation could become a true ecumenical stimulus, an eloquent invitation to a more comprehensive materialization of Christian unity. And, no less, an inspiration toward a practical cooperation in response to the most radical challenge of our day: the threat to ecology.

II.

The main findings of the Strasbourg project were reviewed in my study *Creation and Ecumenical Challenge?*¹ with a collection of documentary study papers with the same title². Important papers pertaining to the study may also be found in *Creation and Culture — The Challenge of Indigenous Spirituality and Culture to Western Creation Thought*.³

The purpose of this study was, as suggested, twofold. Namely, to explore a new approach to Christian unity and to expose a new source of inspiration for a joint Christian ministry to creation. Around 1980, creation, so long neglected by the churches as a troublesome reminder of the unresolved tension with science and of an irreconciled split between spiritual and terrestrial life, popped up in theology in questions regarding the preservation of the environment and the protection of the natural resources. It was only too evident why a new ecumenical start should be made, both in view of the complexity of the practical challenges in search of a wider spectrum of theological approaches to the environment than provided by individual denominational traditions, and in search of an hitherto unexplored path toward mutual Christian recognition.

Three international consultations were organized. "Creation, Contributions and Deficiencies of our Confessional Traditions" (Strasbourg 1983) was structured as "a critical examination of oneself and each other" by six major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Free-Church). "Tensions in Contemporary Theology of Creation: An Ecumenical Challenge?" (Klingenthal, Alsace, 1984) confronted various theological "schools" irrespective of confessional allegiances. "Creation and Culture" (Burlingame, California 1985, in cooperation with the Lutheran World Ministries) invited voices of North-American minority cultures (Native, Black, Asiatic, Hispanic) to question the assumed North-Atlantic cultural captivity of the prevailing (lack of) creation intimacy.

Besides these conferences, Prof Mark Ellingsen carried out extensive research to review statements and positions of the various Christian churches on social ethics throughout the last decades⁴. The purpose was not so much to classify single positions as to observe their motivations, above all with regard to and lack of regard to creation awareness. Attention was paid

1 Per Lønning, *Creation and Ecumenical Study*, Mercer University Press, Macon GA 31207, USA, 1989.

2 *Creation — An Ecumenical Challenge*, LWF Documentation No 28, May 1990.

3 David G Burke (ed.), *Creation and Culture — The Challenge of Indigenous Spirituality and Culture to Western Creation Thought*, LWM Studies, Lutheran World Ministries, New York, 1987.

4 Mark Ellingsen, *The Cutting Edge. How Churches Speak on Social Issues*, WCC Publications, Geneva, Switzerland, 1993.

particularly to the confrontation between creation based and christologically founded ethical reflection in continental Europe.

Ecumenical exchange and practice, especially in the post war period, have been traumatically influenced by the ethical confrontations in Nazi Germany in the 1930s, where the official glorification of race and nationhood was not without the support of theologians of a certain creation oriented observance (often referring to Luther and to their understanding of the traditional Lutheran Two-Kingdom thinking), whereas theologians of a strictly Christocentric type (the Barthian school) were more firm and convincing in their resistance to the regime. Nevertheless, is a creation-based ethic necessarily more establishment fearing than a redemption-based one? The emergence of "Human Rights" in the eighteenth century leaves us with a rather contrary impression. Contemporary ecumenical positions show an overwhelming dominance of a christological argumentation but, at the same time, reveal — involuntarily and unconsciously — the inherent dangers of politicized preaching and clericalized politics.

Another distinct project input was the distribution and evaluation of a questionnaire, dealing with actual attitudes and options connected with creation faith in three parts of the so-called Third World: Africa (Cameroon, Nigeria, South-Africa and Tanzania), Asia (India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Papua New Guinea) and Latin America (Argentina, Brazil), compared with a control group of German speaking theological students from Central Europe. Despite its rather limited scope (186 completed forms) the research gave some rather striking information regarding the characteristic differences in creation awareness in different provinces of Christendom.

When, in the following, we try to sum up some of the main accomplishments of the project, it may be meaningful to follow the keyword of the three consultations, but in a sequence contrary to chronology: culture, theology, confession.

III.

The topic "creation and culture" was geared in two opposite directions: creation speaks on culture, and culture on creation.

Creation speaking on culture infers that culture — different systems of human communication as determined by specific historical and geographical conditions — is the Creator's own design for His creation. All authentic culture, therefore, is basically of equal dignity. Creation demands an open and unprejudiced exchange between human beings and societies of whatever cultural presupposition.

Culture speaking on creation means that all existing patterns of relating to creation are prejudiced by limitations in such a way that they need encounters with other cultures to arrive at a truly critical assessment of themselves. Cultures need one another to correct and supplement their re-

spective relationships with creation. Creation, the most universal presupposition of all, needs to discover how it is wrapped in particularity in order to distinguish and to actualize its own essential universality.

The confrontation with North-American minority cultures, most dramatic in facing the accusations of native Americans, made clear how radically different patterns of human cohabitation with nature correspond with discrepant ideas of creation, doctrine and lifestyle shaping each other reciprocally. This also gives momentum to the question of biblical interpretation: Is the technological and technocratically dominated North-Atlantic culture not more remote from the old Israelite coexistence with creation than any other civilization in today's world, and does it not, with all its world championship in biblical research, badly need guidance from cultures of a closer and more intimate relationship with nature?

Also, the international questionnaire might serve to underline this reflection. From it two rather distinctive impressions remain. First, one of general contemporary confusion. "To a large extent modern Christians, irrespective of continent, could be accused of being constantly inconsistent ... in face of creation faith."⁵ Second, a scale ranging from African optimism (over Asia and Latin America) to European pessimism in viewing "... the different images of the Creator's relationship with the world, of the interpretations of divine providence — including the practical importance of prayer — and of the concrete prospects for future world development."⁶

IV.

The recent arena of creation theology seems determined by two traditionally competing but recently more and more converging trends: one orientation geared totally to redemption and one focusing just as exclusively on creation. In the first case we are dealing with a two centuries old and extremely complex tradition. It starts with Kant's and Schleiermacher's definition of religion as a spiritual room separate from the world of outward appearances. It continues with Ritschl's exaltation of judgments of values at the cost of judgments of fact. It can be distinguished in Barth's rejection of "natural theology" for the benefit of pure biblical *Heilsgeschichte* [history of salvation] and with Bultmann's rejection of objective events to safeguard human decision as sheer existential actuality. In the late 60s it culminated in the marriage of atheist theology and extreme liberation thought

5 P Lønning, in, *Creation — An Ecumenical Challenge?*, LWF Documentation, No 28, May 1990, p. 78.

6 Ibid.

where any idea of creation as something given prior to human self-definition is rejected as the alleged authorization of some oppressive world order.

The counter-trend that of a global creation approach — absolutely triumphant in the eighteenth century Enlightenment — for 150 years played a most restricted role in theology, until a couple of decades ago it was brought back to life, partly due to an explosive environmental challenge, partly by the expansion of American process theology. The latter, issuing from the philosophical work of A N Whitehead rests on a general theory of reality as pure becoming. In continually shaping reality, God incessantly creates also himself. God in his perfection is the (never attainable) aim of evolution, toward whom the world is constantly moving. In this global vision, salvation can only be thought of as a specific aspect of the all-embracing process of divine creativity.

In the *Theology of Hope* of the young J Moltmann (around 1960), a main source of the later liberation theology, Karl Barth's view of history as "salvation history" combined with E Bloch's *Philosophy of Hope* with its striking duplex approach to the Bible. Bloch sees a basic contradiction between the two biblical "Behold-s", the "Behold" of creation complacency "Behold, it was all very good" (Gen 1:31), and the "Behold" of utopian restlessness: "See, I am making all things new" (Rev 21.5). In Bloch's theory the first of these two has exercised a fatal influence in history as the dominant horizon of paralyzing reaction, the second has been the life-giving source of all liberation activities. Hence, the original liberation theology's distrust of creation as a given, with established laws and authorized natural truths. A distrust which also from the beginning hit process theology, branding it as a distracting theological agenda of a purely "it was all very good" orientation.

As the two expanding theological movements gradually became acquainted, voices from both sides started to express growing mutual appreciation. Liberation theologians discovered in process thought an approach to creation with a stress on change and not on givens, on future not on past, and consequently dedicated to transformation, not to preservation. It further discovered a God dealing with creatures not as an omnipotent maker exercising unconditional control of his produce, but as the ultimate mystery of becoming unified with the multitude of its manifestations in shared freedom and dependence. Process theologians on their side learned to expand their vision of the natural world to include, and to emphasize the progressive formation of human society just as much as that of nature. A significant step toward the inclusion of liberation orientations was the joint contribution of the two process authors Charles Birch and John Cobb Jr.⁷

7 Charles Birch and John Cobb Jr, *The Liberation of Life*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Remarkable fruits of this unexpected rapprochement may be seen in two of the most thought provoking and influential creation theologies of the 80s, that of Dorothee Sölle⁸ and that of the mature Moltmann⁹. Of the two, Sölle's contribution may, in its lack of veneration for theological tradition, be the most elucidating guide to theological trendiness of the day. Moltmann, in a profound desire to remain within an ecumenical communion of reflection, is more complex and far richer in theological reflection, but also far more difficult to fence into a simple theological formula.

"In the beginning was liberation" is the guiding thesis of Sölle's theology of creation — a highly contradictory slogan, as "liberation" in any case must be presupposed (1) a liberating subject, (2) an object in need of liberation, (3) an agreed distinction between freedom and unfreedom sufficient to frame the word "liberation" and (4) a concrete case ready for "liberation." In her preface the author expresses the desire to transcend the narrowness of her original unblended redemption orientation and confesses a long felt nostalgia about Creator and creation. The "in the beginning" which structures her newborn creation theology, however, reduces creation talk to not much more than cosmetic rhetoric. Her main concern is still to eliminate the idea of a sovereign Maker shaping the world. Her image of God deliberately reflects no other qualities than the ones she proposes as exemplary of any decent created being. So, all ideas of God-given laws and indisputable divine truths should be done away with. Creation, then, means "to work and to love", i.e., no more no less than creativity as an expression of spontaneous individual activity. God and the human person should be understood as fellow agents, united in one joint activity. Coming, as she does, out of the Death-of-God theology of the 60s and of Bloch's utopian redemptionism, it is easy to see why Sölle could not succeed in her brave promise to re-conquer creation. Her fight for individual self-determination in defiance of all ideas of obliging created order seems rather void of ecological awareness.

Moltmann in his "ecological ... messianic" creation theology, part of his comprehensive "messianic" program of theology as a whole is far better off in this regard. Nevertheless, also programmatically "ecological" Moltmann preserves the pan-soteriological drive of his early liberation theology. At a symposium in Bad Segeberg in 1986 on the occasion of Moltmann's sixtieth birthday, several Scandinavian theologians were invited to confront him on the issue of his creation theology. My attempt there and then to sum up that encounter is published in *Kerygma and Dogma*¹⁰ and is mainly

8 Dorothee Sölle, *To Work and to Love—A Theology of Creation*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984.

9 J Moltmann, *God in Creation, An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, SCM, London, 1985.

10 *Kerygma and Dogma*, Göttingen, 33. Jahrg. 1987/3, pp. 207-223.

guided by my observations of the Strasbourg study. The tags "ecological" and "messianic" suggest a resolute readiness to dialogue, and that in two directions: contemporary science and Jewish creation thought. Nevertheless, at the same time, the old Barthian reluctance against a universal human community of exchange, as represented by philosophy and by religion usually, is striking. Though insisting (against Sölle) on the classical theological assumption of a *creatio ex nihilo* [creation out of nothing], Moltmann sticking stubbornly to his notion of creation as a "messianic" event can hardly, if consistent, avoid being trapped by Sölle's confusion of redemption and creation. The very concept of a Messiah is that of a liberator and is basically empty of meaning in case creation is not accepted as already being there — in its own virtue.

Process theology, coming out of an historical background rather contrary to christocentric liberation theology, namely out of a global vision of creation basically putting all historical traditions equal, has ended up in a remarkable fellowship of conclusions with Moltmann/Sölle. This seems above all due to the far-reaching similarity in the very concept of Creator God. There is a common opposition to a traditional image of God as sovereign Ruler and Creator. God is neither behind nor above creation, he is exclusively in it. (Moltmann would phrase it somewhat more carefully.) And he exposes this world to no law to which he is not equally subject himself. Nevertheless, is such a pan-entheistic image of godhead really identical with the biblical faith in a Creator God? To argue that divine sovereignty is an unchristian idea while legitimating — as a model — human exposure of sovereignty over other humans, is that not really eliminating the main presupposition of biblical creation faith: the all-constitutive face to face encounter of Creator and creation?

This is only one — but probably the most challenging — aspect of the section of the Strasbourg study dedicated to contemporary theology in its ecumenical repercussions. While it indicates currents dominating Christian creation thought over the last couple of centuries, it points to patterns and problems that will probably continue to pursue the ecumenical constituency also through some decades of the third millennium.

V.

The most stimulating part of the Strasbourg project was, however, not the contemplation of dominant trends in contemporary theology *per se*. That section, interesting as it may be in itself, mainly served to delineate another research: the role which different churches, especially by virtue of their long rooted difference, may play to enlighten and to enrich our common Christian exchange on creation. In posterity it may be asked whether it was wise to start the series of consultations with the event geared particularly to this focal ecumenical question. Would it not have been better to end

there, as we are doing now? Or best of all: to repeat and readjust it in some slightly differentiated form at the end of the whole study? Most certainly — if the resources available so had permitted.

In early Christendom creation was a divisive issue indeed. Docetism and later Manicheism approached biblical texts with a preconceived idea of a spiritual world totally opposed to the world of matter. Nevertheless, already the creeds of the first five centuries had for all times done away with this misreading of the Bible. Echoes of it can be distinguished in modern and post-modern phenomena like anthroposophy, Christian Science and New Age, but have not affected the confessional identity of churches within the ecumenical family. From the list of church-dividing issues creation is absent. This does not preclude divisive questions from being creation related in different and sometimes complex ways, but such tensions are not rooted in explicit arguments over creation as an issue in itself. The most rewarding ecumenical question to ask is that of a possible cross-fertilization of various traditional approaches to creation, characteristic of distinctive confessional communities.

As typical contributions of the main ecclesiastical families the findings of the first Strasbourg consultation in 1983 carried on and analyzed in the subsequent study process, were suggested in a series of indicative key words. **Eastern Orthodoxy:** *Theosis*, divinisation, the whole world created for a final transfiguration in Christ. **Roman Catholic:** Nature, creation seen as an organic pattern of global finality, elevated to perfection through sacramental grace in Christ. **Anglican:** The sacramental universe, a unified vision of creation, incarnation and sacrament. **Lutheran:** Creation/New Creation, a dual approach to the theological enterprise as a whole (law/gospel). **Reformed:** Covenant, "God's History with his people" as a key to authentic creation faith. **Free Church:** "No to the world" (in many historical varieties) questioning the establishment orientation of much of mainline creation talk.

It is more than evident that such simple classifications, even when expounded in a certain breadth and with a good deal of historical concretization, as in the Strasbourg study, must be handled with great care and multiplex critical reflection. Used as a key to today's denominational pattern they may just serve to indicate certain statistical trends of differentiation, often monuments of history just as much as operative contemporary patterns of reflection. Still, more closely explored, such trends may hopefully serve, both to shed light on more manifest and established confessional disagreements and — in our present context still more important — to suggest new lanes for us all despite our own tradition to adopt new and enriching glimpses of biblical creation faith. Ecumenical rapprochement through mutual enrichment of our creation theologies — does that not really sound like something? What about sharing inspiration for common Christian involvement, so desperately needed, with God's threatened creation in this world of today — and hopefully of tomorrow?

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LUTHER'S CONCEPT OF CREATION

Five remarks on his interpretation of the first article in
the large catechism (1529)

Heinrich Holze

When we discuss environmental issues in a Lutheran context, drawing upon one of the most important texts in the Lutheran tradition dealing with creation may be useful. Although at the time of the Reformation, creation was not a burning issue Luther, addressing this question in his catechism, makes five remarks, which are worth taking into consideration in the present discussion¹.

For Luther, speaking about creation means referring to the being of God as it is explained in the Confessions of the Early Church, the Apostle's and the Nicene Creeds: "these words give us a brief description of God the Father, his nature, his will and his work." Nature cannot be defined as creation without defining God. In the words of the Catechism: "If you were to ask a young child: 'My boy [sic], what kind of God have you? What do you know about him?' he could say: 'First, my God is the Father, who made heaven and earth. Apart from him alone I have no other God, for there is no one else who could create heaven and earth.'" Luther underlines this conviction concluding that God has created the world *ex nihilo*,² out of nothing: "It is his nature to create everything out of nothing. And it is his very being: he calls what is not in existence that it exists".³ Therefore, to speak about nature as creation has strong implications for the understanding of God and his work. Or more precisely: World and nature can only be recognized as creation as far as God is concerned. Luther says:

1 WA 30 I, 183-185.

2 WA 39 II, 340, 21f.

3 WA 40 III, 154, 11-13.

"The sooner someone recognizes God, the better he understands created beings."⁴

Speaking about creation without reflecting on our own existence is impossible for Luther. There is no abstract, no neutral way of defining creation and thereby neglecting the experiences we have made in and with our own lives. Luther's way of understanding "creation" involves reflecting on the basic experience that our life is not rooted in itself. He says: "We learn from this article that none of us has his life of himself, or anything else that has been mentioned here or can be mentioned, nor can he by himself preserve any of them, however small and unimportant." Therefore, Luther stresses an existentialist way of describing God's creatures pointing out that not only our biological life in the strictest sense but also the natural, social and even the political contexts are a consequence of God's creation: "I hold and believe that I am a creature of God; that is, that he has given and constantly sustains my body, soul, and life... my food and drink, clothing, means of support, wife and child... Besides, he makes all creation help provide the comforts and necessities of life — sun, moon, and stars in the heavens, day and night, air, fire, water, the earth and all that it brings forth, birds and fish... Moreover, he gives all physical and temporal blessings — good government, peace, security." As we can see the world as creation is not a neutral reality but it is penetrated by the presence of God; it owes its being, order and permanence to this immanent presence of God. Creation is not a matter of a mythical past but an event that happens in our present and embraces all aspects of our life (*creatio continua*). Moreover, creation is not a reality resting in itself and already finished; rather, it goes beyond itself and is in its present existence full of signs of a fulfillment still to be expected (Rom 8:18ff).

Against the background of God's creative power a clear picture emerges of what constitutes humankind: "[It is] as clay in the hand of the creator, equipped only with a passive and not an active capacity."⁵ This passivity characterizes the world created by God. Therefore, its natural destiny becomes clearest there where it turns away from itself, and in praise and thanksgiving turns to God: "Since everything we possess, and everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily given and sustained by God, it inevitably follows that we are in duty bound to love, praise, and thank him without ceasing, and ... to devote all these things to his service, as he has required and enjoined in the Ten Commandments." Luther believed human life from birth to death and to the Last Judgment to be deeply dependent on God. The adequate response is, however, not only an attitude

4 WA 276,19.

5 WA 42, 64, 33.

of praise but also the observance of the Ten Commandments. In a context similar to the Large Catechism Luther refers to humans as God's co-operators working in the three estates (*ordines*) of church (*ecclesia*), family (*oeconomia*) and secular authority (*politia*). The premise for this remarkable connection between theocentric theology and world-oriented ethics is that all human work is embedded in God's comprehensive previous work.

Nevertheless, experience has shown that human beings abuse the gift of creation. Luther writes that instead of living our lives as God's creatures we "swagger about and brag and boast as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things as if we ourselves were to be feared and served." He adds: "This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride and greed, pleasure and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord and Creator." As we can see, even Luther was aware of the fact that human beings are not able or willing to live and act as God's creatures and to use nature as God's creation. Although the Ten Commandments show us the way to live according to God's will, they in reality no more than mirror human beings' failure: we recognize ourselves as misusing nature for our own purposes, not accepting its dignity as God's creation. Luther concludes: "Therefore, this article would humble and terrify us all if we believed it. For we sin daily with eyes and ears, hands, body and soul, money and property, and with all that we have." Acknowledging nature as creation therefore means recognizing humans' guilt. It is the way leading to the awareness that one is a sinner. At the same time recognizing the world as God's creation becomes dulled by sin. Every person at every moment experiences the almighty God's work. Nevertheless, as long as God remains hidden behind the masks of creation, human beings recognize only the effectiveness of a general world government which their reason attributes to an impersonal prime mover. "All persons have the general cognition that God is, that he has created the heavens and the earth, that he is just and punishes the godless ... But what God thinks about us, what he wants to give us and to do with us, people do not know this."⁶ The question is how humankind can find true knowledge of God as the Creator of the world and humankind.

Luther concludes his explanation of the First Article with the following words: "Everything we see, and every blessing that comes our way, should remind us ... that this is God's doing. He gives us all these things so that we may sense and see in them his fatherly heart and his boundless love toward us. Thus our hearts will be warmed and kindled with gratitude to God ... for here we see how the Father has given himself to us." This phrase is significant for Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Creed. Al-

6 WA 40, I, 607, 28.

though not mentioning Christ in particular, his language shows references to the Second Article. The most remarkable phrase in the Large Catechism is the following: "All this he [=God] does out of pure love and goodness, without our merit." It is no coincidence that this wording shows a connection to the context of justification by grace - an indication that when Luther explains creation in the First Article he bears the Second Article in mind. Christ is the "seal leading us back through his incarnation to the recognition of the creator".⁷ God revealing himself in Christ is the theological prerequisite recognizing the entire creation: "Although God is everywhere in the created beings - and I would love to find him in stones, or in the fire or in the water where he indeed is, but he does not want me to look for him there... He is everywhere, but he does not want that you are looking for him everywhere, only where the word is, there you must look for him and you will comprehend him."⁸

Through the Word, that is through Christ, God has disclosed himself to the world and has defined himself in his relationship to the world. Therefore, the work of creation has to be attributed also to Christ: "in Christ, Creator and creature are one and the same."⁹ In Him creation has fulfilled itself in an exemplary way. Christ is therefore not only Creator and Cooperator but also "the beginning of all creatures, their means and their end".¹⁰ God's permanent relationship to the world became visible in the place where the Word manifested itself. Therefore, the fact that the world as creation can only be recognized and understood as such by God means that its very nature as creation discloses itself in the place of God's incarnation. Thus, understanding Christ is the theological prerequisite for understanding the entire creation.

Contrary to the present theologies of creation Luther did not isolate the First Article of the Creed from the confession to Jesus Christ. The Creed of the Creator, for Luther, is part of the gospel. The perception of the world as a gift which is given "through the fatherly love of God" is only possible through the work of the son through whom we can look into the heart of the father. The key to Luther's theology of creation lies therefore in the doctrine of justification: only through the encounter with Christ, the Word that became flesh, through whom all things came into being (cf. Jn 1:3), it becomes possible to recognize the world as creation. In this sense God's love for the world created by him is the subject of Luther's theology of creation.

7 WA 33 II, 340, 23.

8 WA 19, 492, pp. 19-24.

9 WA 39 II, 105, 6.

10 WA 46, 560, 33f.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ECOLOGICAL CONCERN

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The phrases "integrity of creation" and "creation in an environmental perspective" must, indeed, be clarified from a Christian theological point of view. It does not suffice that they have come to represent some secularized form of pastoral concern about the risks to life and human beings' health that the industrial revolution unleashed almost two hundred years ago.

Today's environmental problems are perceived as pervading all aspects of human activity. It seems to become increasingly clear that the environmental crisis threatens human life on the planet; yet, obviously, an all-embracing (scientific, political and economic) structure, capable of dealing with the crisis — to ensure the correct identification of its causes and to implement effective remedies — does not yet exist. Its complexity and the widespread uncertainty regarding its precise nature further exacerbate difficulties inherent in the very analysis of the risk.

Many of the causes that perpetuate and/or aggravate the environmental crisis have already been identified. Among these one can list the following: environmentally harmful technologies, the rapid and excessive transformation of natural resources without due respect for regenerative cycles, the global interdependence of development and underdevelopment, the negative "cultural" values of consumerism, an unequal demographic expansion over the face of the earth, and so on.

In addition, many elements would have to be examined in detail if one wanted to get even a vague idea of the extent to which the integrity of creation is endangered. Be that as it may, a clearly Christian definition of the "integrity of creation" and of "creation in an environmental perspective" must include, above all, the kind of reconciliation of humankind with the dynamic processes of the planet which is described in the New Testament: human beings can become new creatures (Gal 6:15), renewed in knowledge after the image of their Creator (Col 3:10), and can continually be changed into Christ's likeness from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). Thus a Christian understanding of the integrity of creation must

be based on the truth that a dynamic new order has already begun and now,

... waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:19, 21).

A brief "history" of the Catholic church's perception of the environmental crisis

The church's first statements indicating an awareness of the ecological problem date back to the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, promulgated in 1965. In part I, chapter III, *Man's Activity in the World*, the constitution defends scientific and technological progress (n. 34) but insists on the regulation of human activity.

Here then is the norm of human activity — to harmonize with the authentic interests of the human race, in accordance with God's will and design, and to enable men as individuals and as members of society to pursue and fulfill their total vocation (n. 35).

In his Apostolic Letter, *Octogesima Adveniens*, Paul VI wrote rather forcefully in 1971 that,

by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he [man] risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation (n. 21).

Furthermore, he noted that "flight from the land, industrial growth, continual demographic expansion and the attraction of urban centers bring about concentrations of population, the extent of which is difficult to imagine" (n. 8). Paul VI paid particular attention to urbanization.

Urbanization, undoubtedly an irreversible stage in the development of human societies, confronts man with difficult problems. How is he to master its growth, regulate its organization, and successfully accomplish its animation for the good of all? (n. 10).

In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979; nn. 8, 15, 16) and in subsequent encyclicals, in particular *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987; n. 34) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991; nn. 36-40) as well as in numerous discourses, especially in his 1990 Message for the World Day of Peace entitled, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*, John Paul II took to heart humankind's need to improve its relation to the environment. One might add here that not only the 1987 Synod of Bishops on the Laity but also

several episcopal conferences, among them the Conference of the Dominican Republic, have also addressed the problem.

Some elements of the Catholic church's view of creation in an environmental perspective

The origin of the church's understanding of the environmental crisis is doctrinal and not only environmental. In many of his discourses therefore, John Paul II maintained at least seven doctrinal points concerning creation. First, the Pope insisted as did St Paul (Rom 1:19 ff.) that human beings can come to know God from the greatness and beauty of creatures. Second, creation is a work of the whole Trinity. Indeed all of creation possesses a "logical" and an "iconic" structure which recalls the patristic doctrine concerning the *vestigia Trinitatis*. Third, creation *ex nihilo* also guarantees the legitimate autonomy of all non-divine reality. Nevertheless, this does not mean that creation can exist, in an absolute sense, by its own resources. Without God, creation would fall into nothingness and be deprived of light. Fourth, contrary to the denial of the hierarchical and qualitatively differentiated structures of creatures within the harmony of the created order, John Paul II insisted that human beings possess a primacy within the visible created order. Fifth, as far as human dominion over all other creatures is concerned, the Pope stated the following,

The command to "dominate the earth" (Gen 1:26) is subject to two limits set by God the Creator.

The first one is man himself. He must not make use of nature against his own good, the good of his fellow human beings and the good of future generations. That is why there is a moral dimension to the concept and practice of development which must in every case be respected.

The second limit is created beings themselves; or rather, the will of God as expressed in their nature. Man is not allowed to do what he wishes and how he wishes with the creatures around him. On the contrary, he is supposed to "keep" and "cultivate" them, as taught in the Biblical narrative of creation (cf. Gen 2:15). The very fact that God "gave" mankind the plants to eat and the garden "to keep" implies that God's will is to be respected when dealing with his creatures. They are "entrusted" to us, not simply put at our disposal. We are stewards, not absolute masters¹.

Sixth, a Christian cannot understand the full mystery of creation in its present state unless she or he also considers human sinfulness and the re-

1 L'Osservatore Romano, Italian edition, 19 May 1990, p. 4, n. 4.

newal of creation or redemption offered by Christ. Seventh, creation requires the believer to speak of divine providence and of the Kingdom of God.² As far as "explicitly" environmental elements are concerned, we can list the following six points, all of which can be found in encyclicals, various documents, and discourses of John Paul II: (1) all species in visible creation are interdependent; (2) natural resources are limited; (3) natural goods, because of their original destination, belong to all of humankind; (4) development cannot be only economic but must respect authentic human values; (5) demographic expansion is compatible with sustainable development; and (6) the environmental crisis is not exclusively a scientific, technical, or an economic problem but also a human, cultural and moral issue.

In search of a solution

Clearly, for the Catholic church, the solution to the environmental problem is therefore not merely scientific, technical, political or economic; it requires moral and cultural commitment by everyone. Especially in his 1990 Message for the World Day of Peace, John Paul II insisted that the problem is a moral one (n. 6) and that its solution requires greater responsibility of individuals and states (nn. 8-9) and a new form of solidarity (n. 10). Already in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II stated that,

When it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity... A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the elements of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialization — three considerations which alert our consciences to the moral dimension of development (n. 34).

Furthermore, sin and structures of sin must be overcome so that,

interdependence... be transformed into solidarity, based upon the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all. That which human industry produces through the processing of raw materials, with the contribution of work, must serve equally for the good of all (n. 39).

Demographic expansion is often cited as the main cause of environmental degradation. John Paul II corrected this opinion in his *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*,

2 cf. Rom 1:19 f.

Just as it is incorrect to say that such difficulties [viz., development] stem solely from demographic growth, neither is it proved that **all** demographic growth is incompatible with orderly development (n. 25).

In his discourse before participants at the Study Week on Resources and Population, 17-22 November 1991, organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, John Paul II stated that,

There is a widespread opinion that population control is the easiest method of solving the underlying problem, given that a worldwide reorganization of the processes of production and redistribution of resources would require an enormous amount of time and would immediately give rise to economic complications.

The Church is aware of the complexity of the problem. It is one that must be faced without delay; but account must also be taken of the differing regional situations, some of which are the complete opposite of others: some countries show a massive population increase, while others are heading towards a dwindling, aging population. And often it is precisely the latter countries, with their high level of consumption, which are most responsible for the pollution of the environment³.

In fact, less than one quarter of the planet's human population uses approximately eighty five percent of the capital resources, eighty percent of industrial energy, and comparable proportions of other resources⁴. In his discourse to the participants at the Study Week on Resources and Population, John Paul II continued that,

The urgency of the situation must not lead into error in proposing ways of intervening. To apply methods which are not in accord with the true nature of man actually ends up by causing tragic harm. For this reason the Church, as an "expert in humanity" (cf. Paul VI), upholds the principle of responsible parenthood and considers it her chief duty to draw urgent attention to the morality of the methods employed. These must always respect the person and the person's inalienable rights⁵.

Recent studies have pointed out that "population pressure" is not always at the root of environmental problems. It does not play a leading role in determining the instability of ecosystems, but it plays a role as an aggravating factor in catastrophic situations, the roots of which can be found elsewhere⁶.

3 L'Osservatore Romano, Italian edition, 23 November 1991, p. 4, n. 4.

4 cf. Alan Durning, "Asking How Much Is Enough", in L. R. Brown, ed., *State of the World 1991*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1991, pp. 153-169.

5 op. cit., p. 4, n. 4.

6 cf. R. V. Garcia and P. Spitz, *Drought and Man*, vol. 3, *The Roots of Catastrophe*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1986.

Conclusion

The harmonious relations with creatures established by many saints as for example, St Benedict, St John Gualberto and St Francis, have been used by John Paul II as models of activity within the earth's dynamic processes.

The personalized relationship that St Francis established with all creatures strikes one as unique. Let us cite some aspects of his attitude toward creatures.

In his *Canticle of Brother Sun*, he called all creatures his brothers and sisters. He did this for three reasons: they share with humankind a common origin and therefore the same Father; they share with it the gift of existence and the same destiny; and, they are symbols and bearers of Christ. In other words, creatures are our brothers and sisters because they are God's gifts and signs of his providential and reconciling love: to God alone do they belong, to Him do they bear a likeness, and in His name Mother Earth feeds us. He gladly recognized his duty to reciprocate divine love with love and praise, not only in the name of creatures but with and through them. Furthermore, convinced that God expresses his will through all his works, Francis was submissive to creatures and observed creation attentively, listening to its mysterious voices and to its mute language. One of his more striking texts, *The Praises of the Virtues*, reads thus,

Obedience subjects a man to everyone on earth, and not only to men, but to all the beasts as well and to the wild animals, so that they can do what they like with him, as far as God allows them.

For St Francis, work was a God-given grace to be exercised in the spirit of faith and devotion to which every temporal consideration must be subordinate. All human activity in the biosphere must therefore lead to a mutual enrichment of human beings and other creatures.

Finally, St Francis' love of voluntary poverty allowed him to develop a form of detachment from an excessive dependence on and use of creatures. Might not such a detachment be necessary today? Would it not be a responsible lifestyle that would reduce, if not check, our wastefulness and destruction of both renewable and non-renewable resources and, thus, redress the inequity between developed and developing countries? Our symbiosis with nature reminds us that we are microcosms that "incorporate" the world within ourselves. How we understand our relation to the world will depend on our self-understanding; and, how we understand our stewardship over all creatures will depend on our self-mastery.

In the thirteenth century, St Bonaventure exhorted the readers of his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (I, 15) with these words,

Open your eyes ...; alert the ears of your spirit, unlock your lips, and apply your heart that you may see, hear, praise, love, and adore, magnify, and honor your God

GOD IS SOLE CREATOR AND LORD

Ricardo Pietrantonio

God the sole Creator (Gen 1:1-2)¹

The first verse of the Book of Genesis sets forth a remarkable affirmation, unequalled in the ancient world: the cosmos was created, *ex nihilo*, by one preexistent, “wholly other” God. On the other hand quite a number of elements from the cosmogonies of the Near East may be thought to lie behind the second verse, 1:2.

The exclusive term

This phrase — “In the beginning ... God created the heavens and the earth” — is a challenging, sensational affirmation in regard to its surrounding context. First of all, a key term appears there — *bara'* — signifying in a special way God's creative act.

*bara'*² is a theological term, of which God is the only grammatical subject, and becomes a concept embracing the explicit faith in creation established at the time of Deutero-Isaiah³ and the formation of the “Priestly Code”. But the difference in tone consists in the fact that while that code refers constantly to the origin of the world, the exilic prophet is to be found rather in a context of salvation-history and transfers the whole weight of

1 I have freely used the work of my colleague J Severino Croatto, *El hombre en el mundo, Creación y designio - Estudio de Génesis 1:1-2:3*, Editorial La Aurora, Buenos Aires, 1974, pp. 43-65.

2 Use of the *Diccionario teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, L Coenen, E Beyreuther, Hans Bietenhard (eds.), Sigueme, Salamanca, 1980-1984, vol. I, pp. 342-350 (H.H. Esser); *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, W. Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart, Germany, 1933ff. (ThWB), vol. III (W Foerster); *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translator and editor, Geoffrey W Bromiley, W M B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974-1976, (TDNT) vol. III (W. Foerster). The word appears in Genesis at 1:1; 1:21; 2:3-4; 5:1-2; 6:7; Deut 4:32; Psa 51:12; 89:13 (12) (LXX 88:13); 89:48 (47) (LXX 88:48); 104:30 (LXX 103:30); 148:5; Jer 31:22 (LXX 38:22); Ezekiel 28:13,15; Mal 2:10.

3 Isaiah 40:26; 42:5; 43:1; 43:7; 45:8, 12, 18; 48:7; 54:16.

the creative act, as something new that has an absolute power, to the past and future salvation of Israel.

The unparalleled act of creation on God's part is expressed by means of *bara'*. In this the creative word and creative action are one and the same thing (cf. Gen 1; Ps 148:5 *passim*). *bara'* focuses both on God's action which calls into existence the world and each of the creatures, and on his intervention in history, to which we have to attribute election, determination in time and human vicissitudes, and of course justification. Although originating admittedly from a root meaning "to cut" or "to separate", there is no precise link with the "breaks" of the first three days. Moreover, in these first three "works" the verb *bara'* is never used. There is no alternative approach to an appreciation of the expression *bara'* in the light of the biblical usage and the context of the chapter⁴.

As a description of the beginnings (that is, to designate the first creation by God) *bara'* is used (Ps 148:5) (a) for the creation of the heavens and the waters under the heavens (the latter, according to Genesis 1:7, were not created, but only located within its bounds); (b) for the spreading of the circle of the earth and the directions of the heavens — north and south — (Ps 89 [88], 12; parallel to *yasad* — to *found* the globe of the earth); (c) for the creation of the mountains and the wind (Am 4:13), of human beings on the earth (Deut 4:32), and of short-lived, perishing humanity (Ps 89 [88], 48).

bara' likewise expresses the new creation of God, intervening in the historical continuation of his work of creation. A people newly created by God will praise God (Ps 102:19 [101:18]). In the well-known passage, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps 51 [50], 12) *bara'* is also used in this sense. Specifically, the passages from the Psalms mentioned above and the following words from the prophets reveal the break which afflicts the original creation and necessitates God's saving intervention among his people and in each individual sinner.

The tradition in Genesis 1:1-2:4a seems to reserve the verb *bara'* for the whole of creation (1:1 and 2:3 and 4) or for that of human beings in particular, or for that of the great sea creatures 1:21), in order to deny them the attribution of divinity often accorded them in Mesopotamian and Canaanite contexts.

In any event the question of chronology is not the relevant one but the fact that *bara'* is a verb reserved for the God of Israel, and that it never presupposes a substance from which something is made. The redactor of

4 If *bara'* kept the supposed original nuance of "to separate" the precise meaning of verse 1 would be that God "separated the heavens and the earth", an idea closely linked to creation myths, especially those of Sumeria and Egypt, but outside the context of the whole of chapter 1 of Genesis. Moreover, when "to separate" is in mind the writer persistently uses the verb *hubdal*.

Genesis 1 wanted to highlight the fact rather than the mode of creation, and for doing so the verb *bara'* seemed to him more suitable because it does not indicate the way in which God acted — which was wholly “original”.

Other terminology

Of the two ideas used by the LXX for “to create” *demiourgein*, “to work in and with a material”, “to manufacture”, “to produce” and *ktizein*, which indicates the decisive, fundamental act of erecting, founding or establishing — the LXX deliberately preferred the latter (and the corresponding word) to signify creation by God⁵. However, the Septuagintal translation of the Pentateuch and also of Deutero-Isaiah, obscures the sense of exclusiveness in the verb *bara'* and uses the everyday term *poiein*, “to make” instead of *ktizein* (making it possible to deduce both how long the production of the LXX took and the translator’s theological awareness, which became increasingly more profound)⁶.

The world view

Once we recognize the meaning of the word *bara'* throughout the Bible and particularly in Genesis 1 we can highlight its grammatical “perfect” usage, indicating something successfully achieved. Everything will start from that original paradigmatic “(he) created”. Moreover, Genesis 1:1 expresses in verbal form (noting the past and completed fact) what biblical and oriental hymns of praise express substantively, i.e. using “Creator”, “he who creates” etc. (cf. Gen 14:19; Ps 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 146:6; Acts 4:24).

This relates to the way in which we have to understand and translate the first verse, as it can be an absolute statement expressed in a [Hebrew] closed main clause: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. Or it can be interpreted as a circumstantial temporal clause with the main clause in verse 3 picked up after the parenthesis in verse 2. The translation would then run more or less as follows: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth (the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, but the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters) God said ...

The difference is not simply grammatical (whether we take verse 1 as a simple or a complex sentence) but has doctrinal implications. In the first case the creation of everything (“the heavens and the earth”) is radically

5 cf. W. Foerster ThWB III, 1022 ff.

6 cf. W. Foerster loc. cit., 1026.

affirmed and the actual process of creation is then taken up: verse 2 highlights the contrast between God's organizing work and his theological work. This is the only viable interpretation. In the second the emphasis falls on the first of the "works", the creation of light, with no definition of the origin of what preceded the cosmos (verse 2), which appears to co-exist with God.

In the past there was a clear tendency in favor of the second translation⁷ — interpreters were prompted by certain Mesopotamian parallels or for reasons of content (the problem of *creatio ex nihilo* would not be raised) — reasons subsequently supported in the context of verses 1 and 2.

Consequently the above analysis leads to the conclusion that verse 1 ("in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth") is grammatically and historically independent of verse 2, or at least from verse 2b and c, as if the narrative had at one time or other begun with this last verse or else with the description of the "pre-cosmos" (the idea of "chaos" seems to be minimized). Verse 1 is as it were the heading to the whole chapter, just as 2:4a is the sub-heading. Verse 1 sums up the whole account and is at the same time an interpretation of the cosmogony as the unique and complete achievement of the God of Israel.

The expression "the heavens and the earth" in verse 1 must be understood on its own: the heavens and the earth are not that original unit which was afterwards divided in the "creation" — a very widespread view in cosmogonies and which takes on an evolved form in Sumer and Egypt⁸. The author of Genesis 1 persists in teaching the entire story of the creation of the world in relation to God, who thus remains transcendent in his greatest self-expression. From all this we may conclude that Genesis 1:1 by itself represents a biblical theology of the world which stands as something unique and original in the history of religions.

The opening verse of Genesis makes us reflect on what it has been agreed to call *creatio ex nihilo* — "creation from nothing". In principle this arrangement fits only the hermeneutic of verse 1 which we have upheld in paragraph b). The question is no longer valid for the other option ("In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth ..."), because the supposition is that God organizes a Chaos which simply "is there", and of whose origin nothing is said. This interpretation is unacceptable in the mind of the writer of Genesis 1.

7 cf. Severino Croatto, *El Hombre ...* op. cit. pp. 50, 61 n. 53.

8 cf. Croatto, *El Hombre ...*, op. cit. chapter IV (2), page 70; notes 23 and 24. In Egypt the sky (feminine!) and the earth (masculine!) are represented by the gods Nut and Geb, separated by Shu, the god of the air, or by Atum, "the great god who separated the sky and the earth" according to the inscription on a stele of Pharaoh Heremheb. One of the Sarcophagus Texts (ca. 2300-2200 B.C.) says: "I was the soul of Shu when he raised Nut above him, leaving Geb under his feet; I am he who placed myself between the two ...".

There is a constant tendency to exclude from this redactor's mind the idea of a creation *ex nihilo*. The argument is that it is late, as appears in a passage from the end of the second century B.C.; "...God did not make them — the heavens and the earth — out of things that existed" (2 Macc 7:28)⁹: there would already be a Hellenistic influence, as in the well-known passage in Wisdom 11:17: "For thy ([divine] Wisdom's) all powerful hand, which created the world out of formless matter" — although here to opposite effect, as if admitting a pre-existent Chaos, it actually refers to Genesis 1:2ff. in a clearly monotheistic sense. Truth to tell, the "priestly" writer of Genesis 1 is not thinking of the problem of pre-existent "matter", nor of the rational or philosophical question on "where the world came from". There is a simple but profound answer to this last question: the world comes from God. However, instead of going from the creature to the Creator he goes in the opposite direction, starting from the Maker of all things: God created the world. It is not necessary to explain that God created *ex nihilo*: for him that statement is meaningless, for the problem has been evaluated from the start. The force of the verb *bara'* — applied to the absolute power and ability of the God of Israel — makes the *ex nihilo* formula not only superfluous but also confusing and ineffective. The expression "God created the heavens and the earth" is completely transparent. It indicates the absolute newness of the world. The picture of primordial Chaos can be understood as a symbol of the *nihil*.¹⁰ Genesis defines creation radically as a wholly "original" and hitherto unheard-of event.

Human beings on earth

Human beings as the "image" of God?¹¹

The statement in Genesis 1:26a represents a central *theologoumenon* for the writer, because he emphasizes it three times in the story of the creation of human beings ("anthropogony") and comes back to it at a crucial moment when he demonstrates the wonderful capacity of the first man to transmit life. No less remarkable is the fact of the continuance in the children of that "image" of God. The list of descendants in 5:1-3 — with an explicit reference to the creation in 1:26f. — seeks to link deliberately the theme of "humankind" [NRSV] as the "image" of God with that of the

9 The passage in 2 Maccabees 7:28 seems to be echoed in Romans 4:17 (*God kalountos ta me onta hos onta*).

10 cf. also Croatto, op. cit., Introduction, for general context.

11 Severino Croatto, *El Hombre ...*, op. cit. pp. 169-192.

children as the “image” of the father. The idea of children generally as replicas of their parents makes us ask if humankind is not also understood as made in the *form* of God. Moreover, as God is not represented in human form, the problem is inverted and again we ask, “What does it mean to be the ‘image of God’?”

The Hebrew text uses the terms *çelem* (“image”) and *d’mût* (“likeness”). Each of these has its own nuance. But there is no need to think that the latter slightly “corrects” or tones down the meaning of the former. There is a reason why Genesis 1:27 does not have to “clarify” the meaning of “image”, and 5:1 uses the other word as an equivalent, just as 5:3 again uses the two together and switches the order as opposed to what we find in 1:26. This indicates that the terms are complementary if not synonyms.

We can define these meanings in even greater depth. The image comes from the first meaning: it does not exist apart from this; its entire reality consists in its being a *likeness*. Thus without God humankind exists neither in its beginnings nor now as God’s image. On the other hand the “likeness” comes from the latter sense, which approximates to the former; it is like a movement to the archetype. The “likeness” is something we encounter and is therefore something which is enlightening. The passage in Genesis seeks to define human beings very profoundly, as beings “perfected” by God in whom they have their origin and who is the archetype of their being and of “the way they are”. In its essence, humankind is “in tune” with its Creator. In Genesis 1:26f., every human being’s divine “likeness” is affirmed. It is neither a gift nor an accidental attribute, but defines the very essence of a human being. Put briefly, humankind, and every human being, is the “image” of God.

The “royal ideology” of the Orient — which makes the king the son of God, or the “image” of God — may have been fruitful for Hebrew thinking on *humankind* as such — Psalm 8 teaches this superbly. It sings of how wonderful human beings are as the work of God — clearly the poet is referring to a moment at the creation — but here and there it uses the language of royal attributes:

What are human beings [*nôsh*] that you are mindful of them, mortals [*ha-’adam*] that you care for them? ... You have made them a little lower than God [NRSV v.l.: than the divine beings or angels (Hebrew: *me ’elohîm*)]. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet.

...Now human beings are *kings*.

The definition of human beings as the “image” of God places them in a different position from that of the other creatures. The latter — the plants and the animals — are created “of every kind” [KJV “according to their kind”] (1:11ff., 21-24). Human beings alone carry the image and likeness of God within them. As Psalm 8 also says, human beings appear in a balanced, intermediate position in the universe — between God and the inor-

ganic or animal kingdom. That equilibrium has to be maintained, avoiding excess on the one hand and lowered dignity on the other. With all the possibilities of the theology of Genesis 1:26f., the author was able to avoid the idea of human beings made *from* God (which is not admitted in 2:7 either). For Genesis human beings are only the “image” of God but, in another sense, a *mirror-image or reflection*, as it were, of their Creator.

In the New Testament¹² the word *eikon* is used to designate the image [NRSV: “head”] of Caesar which appears on the denarius (Mk 12:16). These coins were hateful to devout Jews (because they contravened the prohibition against manufacturing idols and, as if that were not enough, bore the image of the foreign overlord). With the image of the beast the book of Revelation alludes to an image (that of the Roman Emperor?) the worshiping of whom meant apostasy. Talking and moving idols (Rev 13:15) were not unknown in the ancient world.

In Hebrews 10:1 *eikon* means the archetype (which is presented to us in Christ), the reality of “good things to come” as opposed to the law which is merely the shadow [*skia*] of these good things. Christ appears as the image of God in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15. Here there is no difference between the image and the actual being of the invisible God. In Christ we see God (cf. Jn 14:9). But through sharing in Christ human beings in turn become the image of God (Rom 8:29). The condition of being the image of God, which human beings lost through sin, is brought to its fulness in Christ. In communion with Christ we become his image: Paul speaks of this transformation as something that happens now (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10) but is also future — eschatological (1 Cor 15:49; similarly in Phil 3:21). In relation to the restoration of the condition of human beings as the image of God through their sharing in Christ, we may say “that it is already present and yet is still to come — that it is at the same time something we have now and something we do not yet have”.

Dominion over the earth¹³

In the account of the creation of human beings this is mentioned twice: in verse 26b “dominion” appears as the purpose and consequence of their creation “in the image of God”: “and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle — and over all ...the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”. If dominion over the world is the “purpose” of the divine plan to create humankind, that means that this is the central theme. God the Creator

12 ThWb II, 396; *Diccionario teológico del Nuevo Testamento* (D'TNT), II, p. 339.

13 cf. Severino Croatto, op. cit., pp. 193-207.

leaves on earth his own "image" as the administrator of the world he has just formed and filled.

The "dominion" exercised by human beings — expressed by a word which indicates subjugation¹⁴ and is different from the word used in 1:16-18 of the heavenly bodies' rule over the earth — refers particularly to the animals and the earth; control over the animals is a way of stressing and visualizing that lordship [or dominion] of human beings over created things. Thus the "dominion" granted to humankind crowns the work of creation. The whole universe is centered on humankind, from the great to the small.

The writer is interested neither in explaining what this or that plant does, nor in the origin of a hierophany of the heavenly bodies, but in the convergence of the whole cosmos in the intelligent, free beings who "turn" towards that world — who reflect on it, in order to use it and administer it, and to fulfil themselves in increasing approximation to their Creator. The "priestly" writer dwells on the material superiority of humankind over nature in the same way as Ben Sirach indicates in his commentary on the creation of human beings, and on the dominion which has been granted to them and is expressed by an emphatic reference to the *understanding*:

He endowed them with strength [*exousian*] like his own, and made them in his own image. He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds. He made for them tongue and eyes; he gave them ears and a mind for thinking. He filled them with knowledge and understanding [*epistemen suneseos*], and showed them good and evil. He set his eye upon their hearts to show them the majesty of his works ...He bestowed knowledge upon them and allotted to them the law of life. (17:3ff.)

In a topical reinterpretation, Genesis 1:28 may involve science, technology and culture in general. "And does not such a 'dominion' also affect the biological order, for instance as regards the transmission of life?" — "What is 'natural law' for human beings as the rulers of nature?" — "This is not sacral." — "Far from being numinous (which it is for mythological human beings or for the 'cosmological' mentality — such as the Greek mind, which is anchored in the contemplation of *phusis*)¹⁵ this is the field of human enterprise." — "However, human beings cannot use it arbitrarily, but have to place it in the service of their brothers and sisters".¹⁶

14 This verb is *radah*; for a context of slavery cf. Lev 25:43, 46, 53 (rule over the slaves) and 26:17 (subjugation of those conquered in war). In Gen 1:16-18 the verb used was *masal*.

15 On the importance of *phusis* for the Greeks cf. the paragraph devoted to the presocratic philosophers in chapter IV, d/2 of S. Croatto, op. cit.

16 I do not share Serverino Croatto's assessment in regard to the creative, transforming dominion of nature, in "Fe en la Creación y responsabilidad por el mundo" ("Faith in Creation and Responsibility for the World") in *Fe, compromiso, Teología, Homenaje a José Míguez Borro*,

Nevertheless, all the terms used to express this "dominion" or "power" are not in the creational but in the biological, social or political category.

The transfer of power¹⁷

Let us now analyze the question: Does political power derive from God or not? In other words does the religious system legitimize political power as such or not? Throughout the ages some theologies have stated that political power does derive from God, and that the religious system does legitimize the exercise of political power; i.e. those who rule — the state or the "system" — have a legitimate existence and have their being because God has willed that they should be where and what they are. This idea is stressed in the ancient mythical theologies of the Middle East: the myths legitimize the political power of the sovereign through some primeval event¹⁸. Does social injustice on the one hand, and the lack of proper justice or the despoiling of nature on the other, have its origin in [religious] faith?

(ISEDET), Buenos Aires, 1985, pp. 135-145 which was to be presented in a consultation that took place in Klingenthal from 15 to 19 August 1984 and has been reproduced by Per Lønning, *Creation - an Ecumenical Challenge?* Reflections issuing from a Study by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, France, Mercer University Press, Macon GA, USA, 1989, pp. 139-141 (organized by the Strasbourg Ecumenical Centre), where the view is that humankind is a "co-creator". Croatto says that "if we read separately the two biblical myths of the creation of humankind (Gen 1:26ff. and 2:5ff.) we note that in the former the creative action of God stops once human beings have been created "in his image". "Now, the image of God given by the text of Gen 1 is that of a being who is a creator, the lord of an effective Word". "Human beings, created in his image have to be creators like Him, and, what is more, must continue in his creativity." "With human beings in place, God ceases to create". "He entrusts dominion to human beings (*radah/kabas*) over the whole of nature" (But I say that dominion does not imply the being who is creator). "The second account of the creation of human beings in Gen (2:5) explicitly establishes the need for human beings as transformers of nature". "The 'design' which commits them to that is included in God's creative act". "Breaking with the mythical idea of the cultural environment, Gen 2 takes no account of the destiny of human beings for the service of God". "Human beings are placed on earth". "As we only read the present text of Genesis in the Yahwist's narrative it is even clearer that criticism of the lack of cultural moderation on the part of human beings does not counter the initial fact that the world was created for human beings (Gen 1) so that they would transform it (Gen 2)". (To me he does not seem to have taken into account the fact that the narrative as such is "prior" to the sin in chapter 3 and that there we find curses addressed to the serpent and to the ground itself on account of the human beings - expulsion from their natural habitat and restrictive consequences for the woman and the man). cf. Ricardo Pietrantonio, "Mundo, Iglesia y Ética en el Evangelio de San Juan: su interdependencia", *CuadTeol* 6:3 (1983), 5-17.

17 cf. Ricardo Pietrantonio, "El poder político a la luz del Nuevo Testamento" in (by various authors) *Democracia, una opción evangélica*, La Aurora, Buenos Aires, 1983, pp. 67-81.

18 George E. Mendenhall in particular has examined this question in, *The Tenth Generation. The Origins of the Biblical Tradition*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1973.

Two contrasting models

To tackle this part I shall begin by demonstrating a contrast between two views of faith in Yahweh, between the shaping of a people (the People of God) and that of a kingdom (Israel). Patriarchal origins seem to indicate that already from Abraham onwards the People of God consists of all the peoples of the earth ("in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed", Gen 12:3, Gal 3:8 — the first great blessing of the Patriarch), in a statement which at one and the same time is universalist and condemns any imperialist claim or subjection of [other] peoples as inferior. The origins of the monarchy stand in contrast to this biblical aspiration, as the royal jurisdiction tries to impose geographical and ideological limits on the divine promise: it is for Judah and, by extension, for Israel. Let us look at this more closely.

On the one hand there is the Exodus faith in Yahweh (which applies also to the Patriarchs and the Prophets), and, on the other, a view of faith in Yahweh which belongs to the royal ideology (or the monarchical system). There is a shift from the event, the Exodus of the Pilgrim People, to the institution; the movement is from a covenant to a law which in the last resort is a royal law. The people cease to have a meaning, and important personages take the leading role (one has to note how many pages in the Bible are devoted to the whole problem of the heirs or dynasty of David and the succession to the throne — from Samuel to Kings — and that little is said about the circumstances of the people which we do find afterwards in prophets of the caliber of Amos).

With total clarity Exodus shows what is involved. Those who can escape from Egypt — a theme which was to be remembered even when the monarchy was [re]established — 1 Samuel 8:8 — are witnesses to a fundamental event: the people emerge from a system of oppression because there is actually someone — Pharaoh — who has taken upon himself the title of Sovereign Ruler in a political system which is legitimized by the gods' granting him the power, and he is therefore the master of life and death. This tendency is found throughout the whole narrative from Genesis through Judges and indicates that in Palestine itself the original idea was to establish a system in which God would be King or the reigning Sovereign.

If we analyze the Patriarchal narratives we shall see that something similar happens. The patriarchs come out of regions where there is oppression and where regimes are legitimized by the gods, and they go to regions on the periphery (from Mari to Canaan or from Mesopotamia to the Palestinian corridor). In these empires there is a sovereign ruler over life and death, power and everything else; he has the right to impose oppressive taxes because he is the vicegerent of the gods.

In the Exodus — as previously in the Patriarchs' hegira — values are turned the other way round. Now it is not the earthly sovereign who holds the power, but "the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex 20:2, Deut 5:6), one Sovereign

only, one God alone, and in its turn one sole Covenant with one People which has to be shaped by faithfulness to this system through devotion to the Covenant itself, and not through physical descent. This is the sense in which the New Testament understands the citizens of Israel or of the people of God.

This contrast between the system centered on the People and the monarchical system is dramatically noted in Judges 9 when Abimelech (the name means "*my father is king*") made himself king of Shechem by means of lies, deceptions and murders. The parable of the trees — told by Jotham, the only individual who was able to escape the terrible slaughter — illustrates the nature of the royal jurisdiction. Even king Abimelech's guard was made up of idlers and adventurers ["worthless and reckless fellows" — Judg 9:4] and ended in self-destruction after three years of outrages. The Book of Judges twice repeats that "in those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (17:6; 21:25) — indicating nostalgia for the past age when the narratives were being compiled in Solomon's court. It was not to be the first time when there had to be killing, lying and bribery in order to establish the royal jurisdiction.

We have to ask ourselves what the Bible means when it speaks of idolatry. Biblical radicalism is thoroughgoing on this point. In the biblical worldview, idolatry consists in worshipping other gods. What does this mean? "Gods" are those who produce other demi-gods. As I have already indicated, gods in the mythological system legitimize the acts of the demi-gods, i.e. of earthly rulers. When in the Bible we find the expression, "you shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:3) or "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God" (Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12) or again "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone" (cf. Deut 6:4) it is stressing that there are no demi-gods, i.e., no transfer of power to human beings. On the other hand, in the system which has idols the reference is not solely to the worshipping of gods of wood or bronze but also to the conviction that there are demi-gods to whom, as vicegerents governing the fates of human beings, the power of the gods has been transferred.

It is necessary to study the narrative in 1 Samuel 8 with some care. The first point is that Yahweh did not want his People to have a king; what they wanted was to turn to a monarchy such as the peoples and cities round about the newcomers of the Covenant had had for generations — they wanted to be like the other peoples who were living alongside them and at the same time. What they sought has an objective and persuasive justification: self-defense against external enemies — which was really a pretext to legitimize the internal enemy, the struggle for power over others, something which seemed to have been wholly banished from Israel.

The book of Judges ends with the statement that "in those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25), implying personal responsibility — in face of difficulties, threats and other circumstances they might encounter — in order to carry out the

purposes of the Covenant. The book which continues the history is Samuel. This book begins with the narrative of Samuel's birth, growth and ministry and goes into the main reason for its compilation: the establishment of the monarchy. Already in the account of the establishment of the first Israelite monarchy two parallel and contrary lines may be noted: on the one hand that which seeks to legitimize the request made for a king, and on the other that which reveals the opposition to the monarchy — the anti-monarchical approach. The latter seeks to stress that only God is king over his People. The pro-monarchical approach triumphs, and reverts in a way to the slavery of the past — it means going back to Pharaoh, returning to the Mesopotamian systems which Abraham and his patriarchal descendants had left behind.

In those systems someone holds all the power, which is concentrated by delegation in one person who can act absolutely because the power is absolute and total, and the others simply obey the fiats of the king: "he will take **your** sons and appoint them to **his** chariots and to be **his** horsemen, and to run before **his** chariots; he will appoint them to plow **his** ground and to reap **his** harvest, and to make **his** implements of war ... he will take **your** daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of **your** fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to **his** courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to **his** officers and **his** courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one tenth of your flocks, and you shall be **his** slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day" (1 Sam 8:11-18).

In that narrative one can easily see that power and the ideological apparatus are synthesized, as a good superstructure has been found to justify going back to the past. The Israelite king is the one who centralizes all the power and God appears to have vouched for him fully and passed His power on to him. Yahweh loses power at the hands of the monarchical institutions: the king is God's representative and vicegerent — he is God's anointed. That first affirmation of the Covenant code has already been left behind: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods ... You shall not make for yourself an idol (the king), whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath ...".

In the Bible itself, of course, there are justifications and legitimations of the Davidic kingdom, so that — even when the Messianic hope evolved — David himself and his son Solomon were extremely popular among the Jews as prototypes. There are, certainly, narratives which justify the kingdom and its implications. There are also promises of the everlasting kingdom of David and his heirs — something which was never fulfilled. But I should like to point out that in the period of Samuel and the kings there were no worthwhile kings, i.e., kings who had acted as God wanted — with

the justice and rectitude God had in mind when he established the Covenant. And generally the views in the books of *Samuel* and *Kings* are negative, because the kings did not walk in the ways of Yahweh and worshiped other gods — they were idolatrous. This is the same as saying that they took it upon themselves to be the vicegerents of the gods, and attributed the ideology of those gods to Yahweh. Thus they were saying that Yahweh himself, just like the gods, transfers power to his earthly demi-gods, his viceregents — the sovereigns.

One can — and people do — argue about this way of interpreting the biblical world-view, but I believe there is enough evidence in the holy scripture to show that it is a legitimate interpretation, because it is present in the Bible itself. This contrast between the two systems — between the one system which maintains there is a ruler and a people that can give temporary authority on rational grounds or for difficult situations (e.g. in the period of the Israelite judges where leaders emerge for specific missions because of the needs of the moment) and the other system, which advocates transferring God's power to a sovereign ruler, and, in the case of a hereditary monarch, to the system itself, a divine right of inheritance or a legitimization which makes the state lord and master of everything — this contrast is in the Bible itself.

Many years later, the New Testament itself undertook to desacralize once again that type of absolute, divine power.

One conclusion can be drawn: just as in the Exodus Yahweh constitutes himself sole sovereign ruler over against the nations and institutes the decalogue as a sign of the Covenant, so too in the New Testament the interpretation of Psalm 110 shows that primitive Christianity constitutes Jesus as the characteristic vicegerent of Yahweh and thus as Yahweh's sole mediator, as opposed to the Roman Emperor, who was the embodiment of the power transferred by the gods to a human being — a total, indiscriminate power, contrary to the Psalm itself which constituted the Davidic kings as vicegerents of Yahweh.

This conclusion is of great importance for understanding power in the light of the Bible. It is important because it desacralizes power itself; that is to say, it is opposed to a view which makes the authorities the holders of power because the divine system has granted it to them: that is how those "anointed by divine decree" are pleased to affirm the quasi-divine legitimacy of acts done in the dark.

On the other hand the above conclusion is also important in the sense that God has only one vicegerent — Christ. In this way the political system is shown to be workable: the shape a society can take in order to co-exist in harmony has its intrinsic merits as an act of human will and not because it is sacred. Thus a régime can be other than sacred in its form — it can be an invention of the human imagination, which develops socially to find in humankind more co-existence and, humbly, *more* justice.

The system is not sacred but it works in terms of the needs of the moment — the existing situation. In this theological view there is indeed one non-negotiable, fundamental question: God is the Sovereign Ruler and for us Christians Christ has assumed total power, seated at the right hand of the Majesty — and is the definitive and perfect vicegerent of Yahweh. From the Ascension onwards his people have been able once again to have direct mediation through him who is seated at God's right hand, but never through human mediators.

Christ has received all power to liberate his People but the system used to achieve this is not sacred, because power among human beings is not the power Christ received as God's vicegerent, but is a human, transient power. Thus the system — just like those who hold the power — does not have a sacred or hereditary hallmark of any kind. There may be some texts which appear to be contrary to this interpretation but I believe there is only one: Romans 13. Just as there is one Sovereign Lord who transfers his power only to his vicegerent at his right hand, i.e., to Christ, a system may also be created which all must respect; but the system itself is a human institution; it is not sacred by transference. When in a society the system is thought not to be good, the system changes. The best system of all appears to be that which lets the greatest number of possible individuals participate.

Romans 13:1-7: the "governing authorities" are under God

For Paul the prevailing system is good because, as I already indicated above, it is not lasting; and that is why it is not important as a system: and in the "interim" Paul is concerned in counseling the Christian community how to act. But despite the fact that this is a teaching that arose out of the existing situation, it leaves us a significant insight: power is under God, not because it was delegated by God nor because it proceeds from God's own power, but because wherever it comes from it will always be under God's sphere of activity and when it escapes from that sphere it will be corrupted and will fall. Something like this may be inferred in the narrative of the temptations of Jesus, which, although they occur earlier, are interpreted later. In them the devil is the one who receives the power and thus offers Jesus dominion over the kingdoms; the picture is a different one — contrary to that in Romans where the emphasis is placed on doing good and on service. In the picture of the temptations of Jesus the devil has power to rule, and that is why the power is evil. It also suggests that idolatry, worshipping the devil, is related to power — an idea we find in the Old Testament. The devil exercises power to dominate and not to serve. In Paul's view, power is considered from the standpoint of service and not of its institution. In fact it has been instituted for service and not for subjugation.

Final considerations: conclusions

In the light of what I have so far stated one may say that (1) only God can create — human beings are only administrators, not fellow-creators. Throughout the whole Bible the term for “create” applies only to God. (2) The image of God is to be found only when human beings are obedient administrators. (3) The initial blessings are “sicklied o’er with the pale cast” of sin. (4) At any rate the initial authority is only administrative and political — not creative. (5) The New Testament considers that Christ becomes obedient and does not make use of power. (6) There is room in the New Testament for an idea of power similar to that which we had in some strata of the Old Testament. (7) In the New Testament there is again continual desacralization of the idea which sought to give power a divine status in mythical terms, as an idol — i.e., as proceeding from God’s transference of something to human beings. (8) Power exists only when placed under God, as we know that the system is human. (9) There is no sovereign ruler who is a Son of God, or anointed by God, except the person of Jesus Christ alone, now at God’s right hand as His vicegerent; Jesus Christ is Lord, the vicegerent of Yahweh. (10) There is no sacred structure nor sacralized office or function; but there is a human “system”, which is under God for judgment.

QUEST FOR THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Won Young Ji

Preamble

We have messed up God's creation. Nature, living creatures, and the atmosphere are on the brink of destruction. It is an irredeemable mistake (sin), creating a dead-end. There is no reversal after the destruction of creation (the earth and its environment).

This suggestive study-paper, in compliance with the request of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation and the Department for Theology and Studies, is not a comprehensive treatment of the traditional Christian "doctrine of creation", nor a full treatment of cosmogony and cosmology of various traditions (although it is unavoidable that these are touched upon to some extent).

The real "issue" presented by the United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development, the Earth Summit, June 1992, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the LWF Council meeting also in June 1992 is, I believe, not so much concerned with the history, concepts, and the content of creation as such, but rather, with what to do, how to manage, how to take care of, and how to appreciate, creation. Let us remember for instance the reality of the earth which, since the time of Adam and Eve, has been of the same size, whose content and resources are limited in space and time, but whose inhabitants have increased at an astonishing rate. The survival of humankind and the earth depends on the wise stewardship of creation. With regard to this issue there can be neither special friends nor enemies. Inevitably, all are involved with and committed to the critical question of destruction or survival. For this reason, the subject under consideration has a sacred nature and poses enormous challenges to all.

First of all, there seems to be an inevitable conflict between so-called "development" and the ecology (environmental questions), a conflict so serious that we cannot merely sit back and recite a few moral precepts in the expectation that some solutions might be forthcoming. Impossible! Before

making some suggestions, it might be advisable very briefly to look at what various traditions and religions have to say on the subject of creation.

I. "Creation" in various traditions

Cosmogony

* *Creation from nothing*: monotheistic Semitic traditions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The biblical account of creation and the historical Christian doctrine of creation can be mentioned here.

* *Creation from chaos*: to be found in the Near Eastern and Indian sources.

* *Creation from a cosmic egg*: to be found in Africa, Greece, India, Polynesia, Japan.

* *World-parent myths*: creation as the result of the reproductive powers of the primordial world: in the Babylonian creation myth and the Polynesian myth of Rangi.

* *Emergence myths*: as seen in the symbolism of gestation and birth; earth as womb and mother; within the womb of the earth are all the seeds and eggs of the world. (cf. Gaia hypothesis: earth as a living entity, earth deified; mother earth, healer.)

* *Earth-diver myths*: among the aboriginal cultures of North America. According to this myth water constitutes the primordial stuff of the beginning; diving into the water to bring up pieces of substantial matter according to what is ejected from the body, the waste.

* *Evolutionary views*

Cosmology

In cosmology, there are various views among different religious and cultural traditions such as, Hindu cosmology (Hinduism), Jain cosmology (Jainism), Buddhist cosmology, etc.¹

1 There are many materials available on cosmogony, creation myths, cosmology. For an English speaking audience the sixteen volume *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Elidade, 1987, Vol 4:94-119, and others are recommended. For German readers, cf. "Schöpfung" (Kosmogonie)

All religious people have sacred narratives. Creation myths depict the origin and destiny of the world and humankind. "Myth is always related to a creation, it tells how something came into existence or how a pattern of behavior, an institution, a manner of working were established;..." (Mircea Eliade). African creation myths explain why God who once lived alone has removed himself from their world. These are their views on the nature of reality and the meaning of life.

"Creation" in Protestantism

Historically and theologically speaking, Protestantism has since the sixteenth century placed its emphasis on God's redemptive activity (like Luther and Calvin). Thus, God's revelation, His grace, the holy scripture and faith have played very important roles. In the light of medieval Christendom this is easily understandable. The foremost task of the Reformation was to direct attention not to "creation" but to the Creator, not to the "order of the world" but to the faithfulness of God who had redeemed it. On the one hand this was a victory for the newly born Protestantism but, on the other, it has given rise to a new serious concern: the doctrine of redemption and the grandeur of humankind's response to God with faith won, but the idea of creation all but seemingly lost. Theologians were either unable to sense or were insensitive to the *logos* (Tao) in creation. In some circles, theology was not as responsive to the world as it should have been. At this juncture, S Kierkegaard could be taken seriously, namely to take human existence seriously as the creation of God. In fact, no one can understand Jesus Christ and God's redemptive work through Christ, if he or she does not also understand himself or herself as God's creature. Is there a Protestant equivalent to natural law? With regard to our specific concern Protestantism appears not to have a clear doctrine of creation so far, i.e., from the perspective of what to do with creation and its integrity relating to the human survival. More attention should be paid to the First Article of the Creed.

The global concern for creation

In recent years, especially immediately before and after the Earth Summit, Rio 1992, increasing attention seems to have been paid to the global issue of the endangered earth and its environment. This is, for example, true for my homeland, Korea. Articles are being written and meetings are taking place in order to discuss this issue. All types of suggestions are being made

und 'Weltbild' (Kosmologie)" in, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, (RGG).

and cooperative organizations initiated in order to handle the ecological crisis which has become a world-wide threat. As we know, numerous experts in many different parts of the world have taken up this issue and have time and again cautioned us. The depletion of the ozone layer, soil erosion, waterway silting, the ozone-destroying effects of CFCs (chloro-fluorocarbons), the greenhouse effect and the global ecological crisis will soon become the most serious issue facing the world. The most basic commodities necessary for human existence are threatened: air, soil, water, light. It is unimaginably difficult to find a solution to this problem and close cooperation will be required. In a contribution to the special issue of *TIME* ("Planet of the Year: Endangered Earth," January 2, 1989 p. 49) the former US vice-president, Albert Gore, raised an interesting question: "Did God choose an appropriative technology when he gave human being dominion over the earth?" He answered in his own way: "The jury is still out. And the answer has to come in our lifetime from the political system." What is really required is a change in our way of thinking and *uisik-kujo* (structure of human consciousness). We must steer our life and problems "by stars and not by the lights of each passing ship." (General Omar Bradley at the end of the WW II).

Indeed, many educational and informative materials have been published in which the critical situation of the earth — nature, living creatures and human beings — is being analyzed and which remind us of the impending crisis of either survival or total destruction. Therefore I will not take up these issues in this brief presentation but will try to touch on "what impact the ecological crisis may have on Christian thinking regarding creation and what a specifically Lutheran (LWF) contribution would mean in this context." Is there or can there be a Lutheran contribution at this juncture in history when humanity is facing such an enormous problem? I shall try to approach the issue somewhat differently, not mentioning the obvious and serious dangers that exist everywhere on earth and have been described in already published materials².

Recent books and articles not only analyze the issues and problems related to creation, earth, environment and ecology but also contain many helpful suggestions regarding what to do. An example thereof is an article by Professor David Rhoads, "The Role of the Church in the Care of the Earth" (in which he makes a number of suggestions, such as: change of lifestyle, a need for a human transformation, taking good care of the crea-

2 In Korea, there are many materials published, e.g. in *KOREA TIMES*, in church-related publications, such as *Ministry and Theology*, *Christian Thought*, just to mention a few. cf... *TIME*, January 2, 1989; *The New Yorker*, Sept. 11, 1989; *TIME*, Feb. 17, 1992 ("The Ozone Vanishes"); *The Christian Century*, Aug. 26-Sept. 2, 1992, pp. 773ff.; *LWF Information*; *LWF-Studies and Documentation* on creation, and many more..... Many books are also written on creation, environment and ecology, in various languages.

tion (biblical meaning of exercising "dominion"). Moreover, Rhoads mentions many small but important efforts (such as, recycling, conservation, economy, etc.) the parish as a "creation-awareness center or as a green zone." While these suggestions are so obviously vital should we not, theologically speaking, think of a much more basic aspect of the concern behind the environment issue and the concern for creation? Let us look at some aspects of this question.

II. New paradigms, as possibility and ideal

I submit for consideration paradigms from an Eastern cultural tradition (example, model, pattern, frame of thinking) as we search for better theological meaning and significance of creation, that is, a theology of creation, and some viable options for solving the predicament, namely "the crisis in environment and development." As hypotheses, these are things to think about!

The *n'shama* and *ch'i* (or *ki*) paradigm

The very significant Old Testament word *n'shama*³ is translated as *ch'i* (or *ki*) in all three versions of the Bible in East Asian languages (in the Chinese Bible, 1966; in the Korean Bible, 1956; in the Japanese Bible, 1964), for example, "living breath" as "living *ch'i*", in Gen. 2:7. These two words are very important in connection with the creation and preservation of the world.

3 The word *n'shama* in Hebrew appears 27 times in the O.T. It is used in a number of ways: God's "breath" (Gen 2:7; Job 33:4) which gives life to human beings and animals; "the breath of the Almighty" which is parallel to "the spirit of God" (in Job 33:4; 34:14); Man's own life's breath (Is 57:16; Gen 2:7); A living being as such; The capacity for feeling and knowing. Other biblical terms such as *ruach*, *pnoe*, *pnema*, etc. share some characteristics with *n'shama*. Some source materials: Kittel's *Wörterbuch zum AT*. "Biblical Words Describing Man: Breath, Life, Spirit" by Robert G. Bratcher and other similar articles in *The Bible Translator*, UBS, April 1983, pp. 201ff. "The Breath of His Nostrils: Gen 2:7b, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, April 1974, 237-240. There are many writings on this subject in English, German and other languages.

4 No Western term can cover all the connotations of what the term *ch'i* (in Chinese reading) or *ki* (in Korean and Japanese readings) means to the traditional Chinese mind. Chu Hsi (1130-1200), as the author of a Neo-Confucian synthesis, used the concept *ch'i* as an essential aspect of his thought with a variety of nuances. These shades of meaning form a single whole rather than existing separately. Later some Korean scholars developed it further which has resulted in a controversy between the *Ki* (mind) school and the *li* (reason) school. Translating these concepts, *ki* (*ch'i*) and *li* into other languages is not an easy task. Western difficulties in translation may merely represent the difference, and potential incommensurableness between Chinese sets of categories and Western ones.

Implication of *ch'i* (cosmic force, meridian energy)

Any disciplined biblical student who knows the meaning of *n'shama*, especially in the context of Gen 2:7, may guess the serious consequences of that word being translated as living *ch'i* or *ki*. The question is whether the term *ch'i* in ancient Chinese carries the exact meaning of *n'shama* in Gen 2:7. How can we eliminate certain possible misunderstandings of the word?

What is the guarantee of the word carrying the meaning originally intended in Genesis?

As long as "breath" and "*ch'i*" mean the life-giving spirit of God, reverence of life, and the love for life, this may be translated into "freedom" and "human rights" in our day, without which normality can definitely be lost. According to the old Eastern tradition in the absence of *ch'i* or its misplacement sickness could be anticipated, for it is against life itself. Creation — including the birds in the air and grass in the fields (Matt 6:26-30; 10:29) has life because God continues to keep it alive in His intense care. Can *n'shama*, which means the spirit of God, be identified with the Holy Spirit, the third person of Trinity? (Compare with *ruach* in Gen 1:2.) Is the act against creation not precisely the same as an act against God Himself? May such interpretation of *n'shama* also be applied to *ch'i* or *ki*?

A new *tob* (good, lovely) paradigm

Study the word *tob* (*hao, shan* in Chinese) in Gen 1:4, 21, 25, 31 and in different contexts in the Old Testament passages. (Observe different uses of the word "good" in the Bible!)

It is a quality paradigm: what is truly good, beautiful, lovely, and excellent, in conformity to God's will. Not merely quantity! The small can be more beautiful than the big; humility can be lovelier than haughtiness; modesty can be stronger than extravagance; poverty is preferable to evil wealth! Somehow we have to become conscious of the fact that luxury is shameful and a sign of an inferiority complex. "Not-to-have" can at times be preferable to "to have." By all means we ought to relate "quality" to God's agape and take His grace as the highest good.

Paradigm of emptying mind

Without controlling human greed and cravings, as our Buddhist neighbors have been telling us to do all along (also in Js 1:15 - *epithumia*, and other passages in the holy scriptures), the so-called "fair distribution of wealth" (which is, in reality, not achievable), can be no more than a token gesture. This crisis cannot be handled by modifying our lifestyles to a minor extent, moving one thing to another place. It is much more critical and serious! A total renewal of human nature and the structure of human consciousness, as well as an attitudinal change in the area of morality and ethics, are nec-

essary. Human greed ("concupiscence" — the endless desire to get more and more for one's own pleasure and satisfaction) and the cravings of the "old self" and the "old man" have no end. It is, as Luther observed, the root of all evil and sin. The biblical passages such as Js 1:15; Eph 4:22; 2 Pet 2:14-15; 1 Sam 8:1-3; Ps 106:14; Is 56:10-12 and others clearly tell us this truism. All of these indicate forcefully that a radical spiritual movement is needed. This is a serious religious issue as well as a moral problem. Faithful Lutherans and other pious Christians would rightly say: "That can be realized only in Jesus Christ and through His gospel of salvation." Right! The ugly reality however is saddening. How come, many skeptics question why Christians, the churches, the so-called "Christian" societies and nations have so many problems, no fewer than those traditionally called "heathens"? In order to escape from this kind of predicament in life our Buddhist neighbors have been teaching on *sunyata* (absolute nothingness), the zenic state of mind, *nirvana*, *satori*, "the mind of Buddha," etc., that is to say, freedom from human cravings and greed. Can this be realistically possible in the spiritual climate of today?

The *chuen-tzu* paradigm

This paradigm intends to visualize an "ideal person" as taught in Confucianism. *Chuen-Tzu* in English means: gentleman, a royal person, a wise mentor, ideal person, etc., depending upon the context. In the course of time, the concept and its practice have been somewhat abused or misused; nevertheless, I believe it to be worth noting its original ideal. At a time when there are no exemplary persons (or "heroes") and all have become mediocre we need to cultivate role models, whether they be parents, teachers, pastors, or others in society, especially for the benefit of the younger generation. The idea of imitation still plays an important part in education. Moreover, imitation is a biblical concept, as we know, from 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Eph 5:1; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; Heb 6:12; etc. The true *chuen-tzu* never acts against creation; on the contrary, he stands for the harmonious relationship with it. How do we as Lutheran Christians envisage a Christian *chuen-tzu*? Or, are we not interested at all, for it sounds too moralistic⁵?

The harmony (balance) paradigm

When one hears the word "harmony", at least in English and also in German one might immediately think of Taoism or other Eastern thought

5 cf. Ji, "The Concept of *chuen-tzu* in Confucianism and Its Significance Today," in, *Concordia Journal*, April 1991, pp. 141-149.

which have indeed been stressing the idea of "harmony" in life, in nature, and in the universe, frequently by using widely known terms such as *tai-chi* (*tae-kuk*) and the *yin-yang* contrast. In the Bible, we find some similarly significant passages such as Rom 12:16 (harmony and unity, RSV), Rom 15:5; Col 3:14 (bond), etc. Harmony with nature — living with nature, for instance: not to destroy, but to govern, supervise and appreciate it!⁶ This is the same as the call to love, respect and appreciate creation. At a time of global confusion with regard to direction and values, the classical advice on a balanced life, a relation-oriented lifestyle, coexistence and co-prosperity in the goals of life should come to the forefront. This somehow forgotten wisdom may hold a key to the predicament of humanity today. I would like to draw the reader's attention to the Hebrew idea of *shalom* (well-being, peace, harmony, etc.) and the Greek word *eirenee* reflecting on the idea of "harmony" and *tai-chi*. (Understandably, thoughtful readers may rightly caution against "pantheism" and "panentheism").

Having looked at all these "paradigms", one may rightly ask what these Eastern concepts mean with regard to our concern for the "integrity of creation"? They may provide us with some clues as we reassess the importance of creation (all that is created including the earth and humankind) and how to handle them. Definitely the Eastern tradition seems to deal more seriously with creation (creation and Creator, in order), whereas the Western tradition pays more attention to the Creator (Creator and creation, in order). Theologically speaking, the former is more in the direction of the so-called "natural" theology than the "revealed", while the latter (the West) is more inclined to be the reverse. Are they to be considered together with the same seriousness? After all, whose creation or revelation is it?

III. So what do we say?

The readers of this essay may complain that it is still "too abstract"! This may be true! If the suggestions regarding how to solve the "problem" had been too concrete they might not have been relevant for each context since each situation might call for something different. At any rate, what can Lutherans (or Christians) do for such a world-wide concern, namely: development and ecology; the integrity of creation (humanity, earth, environment)?

6 cf. the meaning of *kabas* and *radah* in Gen 1:26, 28.

* Be realistically aware of the "global" crisis; assess the cause of the global problem. Our only house, the "earth", seems to be "on fire"; the earth's capacity appears to have reached the limit of its sustainability. In the past we fought for well-being and welfare, today it is for survival! The Worldwatch Institute announced that if no solution is found by 2030 it is likely that the tragedy is irreversible.

* God and His creation: in creation *inkan* (human) and the ecological system (animals, plants, insects, etc.) coexist through a dynamic process. Maintain a proper attitude, appreciation and relationships (God and *inkan*, *inkan* and *inkan*, *inkan* and nature) with the sense of stewardship, respect and appreciation. Love your neighbor and nature as yourself!

* Inter-disciplinary cooperation must be promoted in order to solve the global problem with relevant efforts ("total approach," since the Earth Summit, Rio, 1992); its goal is to be good stewards for God's creation on His behalf with care and love: altruism for *inkan*, love for nature. The concern for the integrity of the creation and the global problem of the ecological crisis is definitely more of a religious and spiritual issue than a socio-economic, scientific or political concern. All of us must cooperate!

* Examine the system of values: do the advanced ways of life with modern conveniences provide true happiness and satisfaction in life to modern *inkan*? What is "happiness"? We must realize that something needs to be done to solve this inescapable complex problem of our generation which threatens the survival of the earth and *inkan*, by "developing" the petrified human mind, loveless hearts, and the "forest" of endless human greed, craving and luxury.

* Concern for environment, the external aspect: concern for the human mind and *uisik kujo*, the internal aspect. Can we change our "life-style"? Can we realistically conceive of *uisik byunwha*. This goal can only be achieved through the cooperation of natural scientists, social scientists; environmentalists and developmentalists; religionists, theologians and philosophers.

* Examine our confession of faith: look once more at the First Article of the Creed. The answer and solution are to be found in the holy scripture. Frequently we read it selectively. Have confidence and the conviction that the basic ingredients for solving the problem are to be found in the scriptures. Be faithful to what we teach, i.e., the teaching of Jesus Christ, and practice it as earnestly as possible. (N.B.: The teaching of Christ and the two thousand years old highly structured huge Christianity with literally hundreds of variations are not necessarily the same.)

* Enforce laws for the protection of the earth and environment.

* Reduce environmental pollution with the help of the highly trained scientists.

* Be not in despair, with the hope in God who is the Creator and Redeemer in Jesus Christ, and the Sustainer! Have courage that we Christians can do something in order to solve this problem. After all, is it not the Lord in whom we have faith, and are we not trying to enhance His will for His people and His creation?

The concern for the integrity of creation and the problem of the ecological crisis is for coming generations definitely more of a religious issue than a socio-economic, scientific or political concern.

THE EARTH BELONGS TO GOD: WOMEN'S PLACE IN CREATION

Grace N Ndyabahika

The earth is the LORD's and all
that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the
LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy
place?
Those who have clean hands and
pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to
what is false,
and do no swear deceitfully.
They will receive blessing from
the LORD,
and vindication from the God of
their salvation.
(Ps 24:1-5)

Introduction

This paper has been written from my perspective as an African Christian woman priest, mother and human liberation activist.

The "earth belongs to God" is a powerful statement which most people consciously or unconsciously affirm by acknowledging God as the one supreme God, the Creator of heaven and earth from whom all things living and nonliving originate. Indeed at his command, all took their places and ministries.

Hail Him as thy matchless king through all eternity. Crown Him the virgin's son,
the God incarnate born, Crown Him the Lord of Love and peace-from pole to pole,
that wars may cease throughout eternity (Hymn 224, *Ancient & Modern Hymns*).

God created us all, and we are His loved creation. Women and men are free to live and to use for the common good the talents given freely to each and everyone.

African concepts of God parallel to those of other societies, such as in the Hebrew, Babylonian and Assyrian myths, show God's creating and controlling power in nature; and the character required of His creation (human beings included) if the earth is to be blessed by Him.

The work of creation and the mystery of redemption are hidden from human beings and can be perceived only by faith. By faith we believe that God created the world (Heb 11:3). (No account of creation worldwide, not even legends, claim that human eyes witnessed the creation process.) According to the biblical source of creation, dust from which man and animals were formed was primary substance (Gen 2:7; 19).

Because God is transcendent and independent of His creation, we understand creation as the free act of God determined only by His sovereign will. "For, 'In him we live and move and have our being';" (Acts 17:28). "Creation, (in other words) is theocentric and is intended to display the glory of God (cf. Ps 19). In God's sight all are good, beautiful and complete.

The place of human beings in creation

Accounts of creation put the human being (man and woman) at the center of creation. Under God's authority women and men assume their complementary roles as caretakers and stewards of the rest of creation. Human beings also experience a live relationship with the Creator, drawing their strength, wisdom and sense of existence from Him. Thus, the Ngombe people say that God is the beginning, and in Him all things exist as He made them. The Zulu hail Him as "the one who sprang up first, while the Bakiga (Uganda) say that He is the mother of the earth or the "*Bainyina' obutaka*." Emmanuel, "God with us" as the Hebrew people knew Him.

Whereas by His "Word" God simply brought all others into existence (cf. the creation account in Gen 1-2), God took time and great care to create human beings — as man and woman, independent of one another. Both sexes were named side by side as equal partners. Neither man nor woman witnessed the other person being created. When man was created the woman was not there, she did not exist, and while the woman was being created, God put the man to a dead sleep. Woman and man were thus attributed the same "source" of life on equal footing. Even in the totally patriarchal Hebrew tradition according to whose laws women were categorized as men's property, God's law clearly affects both sexes equally and they are regarded as individual persons.

In the Yahwistic narration of creation (Gen 2:4-3:24) man was created first, then the plants for his food and animals for his company. Since the animals could not fulfill man's unique need for a companion "like him", God thoughtfully created the woman; not from the soil but from the rib. The woman was created to "help" not in the sense of being a subordinate or servant but as a colleague, counterpart or sustainer. God assigned them a partnership mission, as stewards of the earth. It should be noted that the Hebrew words for "woman" and "man" sound similar as do "ground" and "man". The words "man or woman" in most African languages share a common root, i.e., *omuntu* or *abantu* include male and female beings, although they are different as man and woman *omushaija* "man", *omukazi* "woman".

According to Genesis 1:27-28 man and woman were simply created simultaneously. Both were attributed the same source and purpose on equal footing. Leviticus 15:19-33 for example elaborates the rules governing a woman's ritual uncleanness during and after menstruation, exactly parallel to the juxtaposed laws dealing with male seminal emissions (Lev 15:1-18). This observation however does not take away the hard truth that the Hebrew society which established these laws and values was totally patriarchal. According to this law women were property (as girls they were their father's property and when married their husband's).

Nevertheless, "God looked at everything He had made, and He was very pleased." (Gen 1:31) The woman crowned the creation process.

When the lonely man (Adam) saw (Eve) the "woman", he sighed with relief and intimacy. "At last here is one of my own kind! She is like me. I and she are "one" bone of my bones; flesh of my flesh! Indeed she is my helper, my teacher, my comforter, loving mother/sister and counselor. My companion indeed." This shows that the man was lonely and helpless without his companion "the woman."

Although Eve's feelings are not recorded I am sure that she drawn to man as her own body, her lover and companion. "My beloved is mine and I am hers/his," must have been a song in their individual hearts as they celebrated their partnership mission. Oh how I wish that men, women, indeed everyone were to continue to enjoy that spirit of oneness and roundness.

Mother

Although man and woman are equal partners, man does not experience carrying another person in his body for nine months. He cannot bear the pain of birthing another life through his flesh, nor does he possess the patience, sacrificial love, and ability to care for the helpless tender life of a growing person, let alone the heartaches and the birthing pangs which, like a sword, pierce her heart repeatedly when her own children scorn her or afflicted by unjust circumstances. After seeing the Savior against his

mother's chest, Simeon prophesied to Mary, "A sword will pierce through your own soul..." (Lk 2:34-35).

Indeed for hundreds of generations women all over the world have groaned under the heavy load of the oppressive culture of a man's world. Nevertheless, did not God sovereignly create man and woman and elect them both, male and female, to be stewards of the earth under His authority and guidance? Did not God give to the woman the unique role of capable helper (as God Himself is our helper)? God indeed created the woman for a nurturing and maintenance role (Gen 2:18-22). This is theocracy, or the rule of God through His chosen (appointed), anointed and authorized agent(s). The woman's role as a suitable helper therefore is not the role of an ordinary servant. Instead, it is like that of Christ emptying Himself for the salvation of what He bore or created.

Parallel to Christ's ministry a story is told of a woman who out of her unconditional love for her helpless baby boy entered a burning house to rescue the child from being burnt to death. Young as she was (could have produced other children since she was tender of age), she forgot "self" and entered the burning house. Luckily, she found her son still untouched by the fire. She picked him up and held him tightly to her chest between her breasts. As she tried to rush to the main entrance to flee from the collapsing roof, she stumbled and fell in the doorway, her child well-protected right under her chest. Then the front of the burning roof collapsed on her back. Although she survived the accident, she was badly hurt and disfigured. The son was unharmed because he was kept secure under his mother's burnt body. (I asked where the father of the child was then and what he had been doing at the time of the accident, yet no one was able to satisfy my curiosity). The boy grew to be handsome and progressive. Yet, unfortunately, his mother's ugly looks always disgusted him. It was a relief for him to leave home in order to pursue further studies abroad. During the holidays he decided not to go home like the rest of the students because he preferred to keep away from his mother. He did not appreciate his mother's love, although her heart yearned for him. One day, she decided to venture into the city to the university where he studied and lived so that she might see him. When she finally arrived on campus she asked students to help her find her son. Immediately they called him; but when he looked down from the fourth floor of the Nkrumah Hall of Residence and saw his disfigured mother at the entrance of the building, he became very annoyed and angrily shouted at the students telling them not to disturb him since he did not even know "that ugly old woman." When the mother heard her son's cruel words she cried out aloud. With a faint heart she called, "My son, I was burnt because of you. I returned to rescue your helpless, but dear life from a burning house, because you are mine and I love you. You are precious to my life!"

From this story one could conclude that the woman's qualities, her role of birthing and nurturing others, her free giving and daring to care, her sac-

rificial love and availability in all situations, particularly in hard situations and her perseverance, resembles divine love. In the Bible and the primitive accounts of creation, God is portrayed as loving and providing freely in protecting and nurturing of His creation as a mother caring for her children (Isa 66:9; 13; 14). In His role as "Mother", Creator and Helper, God stands on the side of the poor, weak, and vulnerable desiring to help and empower them. Like God, mother (woman) is indeed a suitable or capable "helper" moved by nothing other than love, justice and the integrity of all persons. Only God and woman can love beyond self.

God, woman and earth in their motherhood role

Throughout the history of humankind, God, woman and earth have kept their faithful roles as providers, protectors, and nurturers of life. The three have tirelessly shared toils and hardships to give life, to protect and to support the ungrateful species. The three hardly share in the joys and pleasures of their labor on earth. Instead, their due respect and honor (as creator, mother and provider) are taken for granted, if not literally trodden upon and turned upside down by their offspring and subjects. Would life have existed or survived without the three life givers and sustainers? Obviously not.

Nevertheless, the three have continued in their endeavor to persevere in the struggle for wholeness of life and solidarity in diversity which indeed is strength. This may be so because of their nature and fullness in love (*agape*) and commitment to that which they have begotten. It is their joy to bring forth life and to nurture it freely - come rain or sun. Although for the work well done a "thank you note" would have been highly appreciated none has been forthcoming. When Jesus Christ healed ten lepers and only one of them returned to thank him, he wondered why the other nine men did not come back to thank him for having been cleansed of their sickness. "Was none of them found to return and give praise to God, except this foreigner?" he asked (Lk 17:12-18). Similarly, our "mothers" God, woman and the earth would lovingly value our act of appreciation for what they are to us human beings.

Despite the humiliation in all forms of oppression, God in His state (as Creator, Provider and Protector of life) continues His work of creation and nurturing of life through the heart of the earth.

Last, I would like to highlight some positive experiences that God, woman and the earth share in their motherhood status: God rested from the work of creation on the seventh day. After giving birth to a baby, a mukiga woman (Uganda) should rest for seven days. Similarly, "mother earth" or "mother land" should rest for a couple of years after she has yielded crops and vegetables. How often are these times honored or acknowledged?

Woman and man in the commonwealth of God

The woman's role of mother, helper and companion is overwhelmed and swept away by her self-centered father, brother, husband, colleague or son. She is deprived of her rights, and her voice to claim them as she is literally being marginalized and placed in a helpless position, even in her own home. As mentioned earlier the weapon used to oppress the woman is first and foremost "her own nature of being" (her divine like nature). The African woman for example, cannot simply fight hard against "her flesh and blood", the children of her womb!

The other strong weapon that has been effectively used to suppress African women is that integral part of culture and tradition that favors men over women, sons over daughters. Sadly generations of women have out of ignorance participated in the implementation of these oppressive cultures. For instance a Mukiga daughter (Uganda) will be warned by her mother, "to prove a good wife you must not try to defend yourself. Speak once and let your husband (foolish or wise) speak twice. Accept wrong even if you know you are right. Then you will have no problem in your new home. You will be loved and cared for by your husband and in-laws." What happened to the original role and identity of a woman as it was at the beginning of life? Were they not woman and man, wife and husband in their complimentary roles as companions? Who made man the leader? Unfortunately the woman's companion must have taken advantage of her at her vulnerable times such as her menstrual cycle, her antenatal periods, and her divine like nature that does not retaliate. Yet, God requires the man to render noble services to his companion (wife) during such times of need. In pain of childbearing, it is her right to receive assistance from her partner.

Women have been capable of caring for and supporting their sick or retarded sons, husbands and fathers. In the same way, expectant mothers, nursing women or sick women should be helped by their counterparts; and this should not reduce anyone to being another's subject. Truly traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity have been ridiculed creating confusion for both men and women as to how to relate to one another.

One could conclude that most men are egocentric and introverted while women are sociable and extroverted. I am convinced that most women do not like a lonely, selfish life such as the majority of men prefer "We are because you are" whereas most men would prefer to say: "I can manage alone, please give me a break."

Solidarity and its complications

In one of his hymns to celebrate God's creating and controlling power in nature, David in Psalm 24 describes the character required of those who

would worship at Yahweh's sanctuary, and the righteousness required of the people if they are to be blessed by the sovereign God. Since God clearly centered the earth on human beings, woman and man, as His favorites among all other creatures they must be worthy of his love. God's desire, I believe, was for all people on the earth to experience oneness with him and with one another in the fullness of life. Instead human beings (men in particular) preferred to walk away from the whole as lost and estranged creatures — to worship idols in the form of power, money and pomp.

According to one African legend God once lived not far away from the people. He had to move further and further away from the earth because of people's inconsiderate and foolish acts. Then God only came to them in times of great need. Similarly the biblical account of creation (God, man, woman, relationship) affirms that human beings disobeyed (sinned against) God's commandment. As a result God cursed them out of His presence (paradise). Henceforth, woman and man, shamed and dishonored, walked out of paradise (order) into chaos and disaster.

In such a vulnerable, broken relationship man will forever "sweat for his food". He will not live forever as God intended in the original plan. "In the pain of child bearing" (and her vulnerable times such as the menstrual cycle) the woman will "seek" due assistance from her companion (husband) and co-parent (father) of the child. The "okay" people, the elite, the rich, strong and well cannot easily see the need or feel the urge for solidarity with the "not okay" people. The lack of solidarity is the root of all suffering in this world. It breeds injustice and leads to the oppression of all those who cannot simply fight back or have no voice, no power or chance to defend their human rights.

Most of our brothers (men) mercilessly usurp leadership position in human institutions including the home, putting women down or away into subordinate positions. They use force not logic. They grab or assume the position without question or shame.

* Why should all this happen in the orderly commonwealth of God?

* Are the persistent love and faithfulness of many women a weakness?

* Is it possible for men and women to assume their equal partnership and companionship as God originally ordained them?

* How long will women continue to be peacemakers? "... in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" (Gen 1:26-28).

Cooperation and wholeness are possible through the love of our Creator in Jesus Christ the seed of (Eve) a woman our Redeemer; more especially for believers in Him. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God — not because of works, lest any "man" should boast. Each of us is created for good works that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them... remember you were (at one time) separated from Christ (God) having no hope and without God in the world. Nevertheless, now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For He is our peace who has made us one and has broken down the dividing wall... because the earth belongs to Him, what God says or does is firm, true and worthy of praise and respect. Humanity therefore, needs to respect God's order and purpose of creation. Can we oppose God and live?

Need for participation and wholeness

At the Earth Summit in 1992 Sallie MacFague challenged theologians and all the people of God when she said that it was high time that we shifted our theological emphasis from dualism to holism and from authority to participation and community. MacFague was right to challenge the "one man headship". "Indeed, it requires two sets of teeth to break a bone". Obviously God did not establish the earth and all creation in chaos, but in order and harmony. All living and nonliving things live in life cycles, giving and receiving from one another, each strengthening the individual and the whole creation. It is necessary therefore for us, men and women, to realize our natural interdependence, to interact and to work together toward this wholeness. Let us remember to include all persons (the weak and strong, the rich and poor, the young and old) in the struggle for justice and fullness of life. As individuals each has a talent to bring. In that spirit of old, God's love and peace will again be fully ours. We need to desire to be together and to obey His statutes and laws.

God therefore appeals to all of us to repent and be cleansed of our injustice and our unrighteousness. He wants us to cease to do evil and to learn to do good. To seek justice, to rescue the oppressed, to defend orphans, and to plead for the widow as the prophet Isaiah tells us to do. How does that sound to you? Could it be appealing in your situation?

The African Christian woman has recognized this challenge. She has taken it to heart and to action because she herself is subjected to injustice and oppression. She has acknowledged God's mission and purpose for hearing and reconciliation, because she herself is badly hurt. She has understood God's mission and purpose for wholeness because she is deprived of her own children. Her natural role as "mother", "helpmate" and "woman"

as appointed by God is disregarded and distorted by her supposed companions and her own children, sons husbands and colleagues.

Still persistent in her role of "mother", and "helper", women from all corners of the earth raise their voices! They call on their fellow women, men and children to join hands and hearts in the efforts to enhance solidarity with the community and all of creation. Women as co-creators with God are indeed "called" and moved to embark on the healing mission so that the Creator may once again bless the earth and all her inhabitants. Women are deeply concerned about the partnership, solidarity and oneness so unnecessarily lacking among the members of (the earth) the commonwealth of God our Creator and our Good Master.

We are learning that we do not own the land, that the earth is not ours to control.

We affirm that "the earth belongs to God" for now we see that our "God is the king of all in his own right, possessing powers and qualities that transcend the earth and times. The Lord possesses every potentiality and power. He has the right to be called Yahweh, the omnipotent.

The one supreme God and the Creator of all.

CREATION

Elizabeth Bettenhausen

Introduction

Theology is relational language. It discloses not intrinsically but cooperatively — between speakers or writers and hearers or readers. Theology is community language.

No theology can have a universal, identical meaning for all Christians, not even for all Lutherans. The meaning of a theological claim is a function not only of the tradition of theology of which it is a part. The meaning is a function of the social, political, and economic situation in which the statement arises and is received or rejected.

Whether the theology conveys the Holy as gracious and just love or as deadly alien is crucial. Traditional theological statements — from scripture to creeds to confessions to contemporary church doctrine — can function to disclose the Holy as life-giving or death-dealing. One test of good Christian theology is whether it conveys the justice, love and grace of the Holy with whom Sarah and Hagar, Mary and Elizabeth struggled.

Theology is good theology if it serves the well-being of the poor, the oppressed, the ones deprived of the power which makes living abundantly possible. As a Christian feminist, I judge theology by its ability to serve the well-being of the less advantaged in each situation. All over the world children and women are likely to be the less advantaged, the less powerful, the more oppressed. But in the exponential development of power resources since the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the United States, the earth itself is often in the less advantaged position in relation to human action.

Any theology which serves to maintain and justify the subordination of the earth to humans' interest, the subordination of children to adults' interest, the subordination of women to men's interests, the subordination of people of color to whites' interest is intolerable. "Creation" as a theological category has often been used in this way. Orders and structures of creation have been imagined and claimed which construe all reality in a hierarchy of values. Such theologies place male over female, spirit over matter, adult

over child, human over animal, living over non-living, and culture over nature.

The theological reason which imagines such systems is neither universal nor specially gifted with revelation. Rather, these theologies express the place, interests, and advantage of those who create them: privileged men. To reform this situation, many voices must be added to the theological conversation. Confessional identity which is incompatible with human diversity is as dying as the rivers, lakes, and farmland polluted by human pride. I propose the following issues in developing theologies of creation, therefore, not as universally true but as particularly urgent from my perspective as a feminist, Lutheran woman from the United States, teaching in both traditional [Harvard] and non-traditional [Women's Theological Center] theological education.

Issues in developing theologies of creation

1. Considering earth-related, ecological, environmental matters under the doctrines of redemption and sanctification, as well as of creation

Human beings are inextricably interdependent with all other aspects of earth. This ecological reality cannot be dismissed when considering the well-being of the human community in religious terms. Salvation does not end A-dam's status as earth-creature. Human well-being is impossible without earth-well-being. The ecological well-being of earth is integral to redemption and sanctification.

2. Rejecting anthropocentric privilege in relation to the rest of creation

The well-being of earth is not simply of instrumental significance, useful for human salvation. The earth is as intrinsically valuable as humans are and, as creature, as vicariously valuable as humans are. Criteria which would arrogate privilege to the human in relation to other species or systems — criteria such as consciousness or soul or spirit of conscience — are neither so self-evidently superior nor so unambiguously used as to override the suspicion of human self-serving.

3. Affirming the material interdependence of Jesus with the earth

The threat of docetism lies not only in the denial of the physical body of Jesus but also in the denial of the material dependency of the human body on

earth systems and economic, political, and cultural structures through which basic necessities of life are secured. The incarnation and resurrection of Jesus are, theologically, affirmations of the goodness of embodiment within the ecological complexity of earth. The teaching on the ascension of Jesus must not undercut this.

4. Holding earth-community as prior to and prerequisite to church community

The paucity of reference in the creeds to the earth-base of all community is dangerous today. The work of the Spirit is neither exclusively nor even primarily in the "holy, catholic church the communion of saints." The "giver of life" gives not only human life and certainly not only Christian life. In ecological perspective all life and so-called non-living reality are interdependent. Thus, the life-giving work of the Spirit and the creative and sanctifying work of God are different human designations of the same phenomenon. Ecclesiology which neglects ecology is deadly.

5. Rejecting the type of apocalypticism which devalues the present and future condition of the earth by holding its destruction to be prerequisite to salvation

Catherine Keller puts this point well. "The extravagant moral dualism of the apocalyptic perspective, which can resolve the tensions of worldly life only by destroying the world, has returned with the full secular force of U.S. industrial power in this decade [1980s]. Reinforcing the moral dualism is a theological dualism, in which an absolutely transcendent deity reigns from outside his 'creation', utterly independent of that world. This in turn yields a temporal dualism of beginning and end: creation is at the start, and eschatology refers to a literal conclusion."¹

The theological dualism of old creation/new creation, while not necessarily apocalyptic in its eschatology, can easily be interpreted in anti-earth, anti-body fashion. Such interpretation must be explicitly rejected. Scriptural theologies of imminent eschatology or apocalypticism should not be used today to avoid the moral claims which the earth puts to humans.

1 Catherine Keller, "Women Against Wasting the World: Notes on Eschatology and Economy", in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1990, p. 255.

6. Dropping the metaphor of patriarchal birthing to express the meaning of creation and salvation

The Creator God in Genesis does not transcend sexuality by creating by the world. Rather, the Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*, and the Hebrew myths (derived in part from it) served the purpose of displacing myths of female cosmic power by male verbal power as the means of creation. Indeed, the destruction of the goddess as prerequisite to male creation is explicit in the Babylonian myth and implicit in Genesis 1 and 2. The Creator God is Father.

But the human female's reproductive power is not simply displaced but also devalued in subsequent theology. The Johannine metaphor begins a history still working in the baptismal prayers. New birth through a "heavenly Father" becomes the solution to being "born children of a fallen humanity", a new phrase for "being born of woman". Salvation depends on being reborn by a father.

At the same time, the creative powers of women were restricted to reproduction or a-sexual spirituality. The theology which has identified men with spirit, reason, and culture and women with body, emotion, and nature is too familiar to need rehearsing. It is also too deadly to be continued.

7. Reforming the exclusively masculine metaphors for the Trinity

The claim that the Father-Son relationship within the Trinity is a transsexual or a-sexual relationship is unbelievable. The political history of sex and gender metaphors in Christianity belies the notion of intra-Trinitarian paternity as nothing to do with human paternity. The exclusion of a maternal generation within the Trinity is neither accidental nor insignificant. The absence of mother, *mater*, matter, reinforces the earth-escaping, transcendent otherness of this God. The theomorphic masculine and geomorphic feminine are construed as mutually exclusive. The form of woman cannot be the form of God, and vice versa. The form of man cannot be the form of earth, and vice versa. This is bad news for women and girls.

8. Interpreting creation and bipolar antipathies is bad theology

Using dualistic opposition as the basic category for understanding the world reduces the dynamic complexity of the cosmos, including human culture, to false simplicity and stasis. Such misunderstanding can only lead to destruction. Whether the opposing poles are spirit and matter, male and female, divine and human, adult and child, white and black, or others, such division of human experience distorts and rends creation. Difference is construed as opposition or exclusion. The effect is to understand every "other" as enemy. The other must be conquered and even destroyed.

In this connection, the metaphors of violence which have been used in Western cultures to describe men's relationship to women and the earth must be noted. The "virgin" land or forest is, in the words of Sir Walter Raleigh, "A country that hath yet her mayden head, never sakt, turned, nor wrought."² The land which is strip-mined or clear-cut is "raped". The images of violence against women, used by men to describe the "taming" of the earth, are also images used by men to raise their fighting fervor in the military.³

9. Rejecting the notion that nature is passive, while spirit (divine and male human) is active

In the hierarchical arrangement of polar opposites in Western thought, agency decreased with each lower stage, from godly omnipotence to passive matter. That nature would be malleable and ample was a given. Orders of creation were posited which placed women, slaves, animals, and various "others" near the bottom of the hierarchy, closer to or part of "nature". Agency was the prerogative of colonizing men. This view is bankrupt, with its concomitant understanding of power as non-cooperative. Non-cooperating power is non-ecological power.

10. Acknowledging that nature is both the means of subsistence and a medium of the holy for many people

Physical and spiritual nourishing are intertwined. When they are broken apart, ecological integrity is threatened. This happens when environmental degradation makes subsistence impossible. It also happens when theological imperialism makes spiritual health impossible.

2 Quoted by Susan Griffin in *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, New York, Harper & Row, 1980, p. 47.

3 Carol Burke reports misogynist, sexually violent, and sadistic songs and chants used by men in the Naval Academy of the United States in an essay in *The New Republic*, August 17 & 24, 1992, pp. 16 f. The use of pornographic films to arouse U.S. Air Force pilots for their bombing missions in the Gulf War was reported by the press (e.g., *The Boston Globe*, January 27, 1991, p. 16).

REASONS AND FOUNDATIONS FOR AN ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY OF CREATION

Kjetil Hafstad

The spiritualization of nature

In the Western world, the problems arising from the term "theology of creation" have become so complicated that one is easily tempted to suppress them. One area of intersection is the relationship between the natural sciences and theology. In the empirical natural sciences there were originally signs of an enthusiastic embrace between scientific researchers and theologians. The discoveries showed the immense variety and rightness according to which all created things had been ordered. The order discerned behind the variety seemed to point to an omniscient and omnipotent God who directs the universe.

Nevertheless, the harmony ended and the natural sciences broke loose from the contact with theology. After this, innumerable epoch-making discoveries were made, without the concept of God. A modern, mechanistic image of the world emerged which gave an answer to many of the questions posed by contexts in nature in a way that many perceived to be self-evident. Theology was put on the defensive, and occupied itself with more introspective studies, not least of all with the human person as a thinking and believing subject. Moreover, the attempt was made epistemologically to clear a field for theology's specific way of thinking, distinct from the way of thinking appropriate to the natural sciences or to history.

Only a few theologians followed what was happening in the natural sciences, among them Karl Heim who was fascinated by the initial indications of a breaking away from the mechanistic world-view. When the atom emerged as a microscopic image of the solar system, where energy, mass and movement are linked relationally, he glimpsed new possibilities for theological apologetics. He affirmed enthusiastically that matter becomes *spiritual* through this discovery. He held that when the fundamental ele-

ment in nature is spiritualized, new possibilities are opened to form faith in accordance with natural science.

Neither the natural scientists of his time nor theologians accepted Karl Heim's observation. Nevertheless, in the meantime the problem to which Heim pointed has steadily become clearer. The natural sciences' image of the world has changed from a mechanical simplicity to a complexity which even the imagination has difficulty to grasp. The natural sciences have *de facto* taken on something of the same problem of plausibility — *vis à vis* most people — that theology experienced when the mechanistic image of the world was in the ascendant: "The new situation in the thought of today arises from the fact that scientific theory is outrunning common sense" (A N Whitehead). For example, the models now used to grasp the development of the universe do not correspond to anything concrete in people's own conceptual world. The idea of the "big bang" as the birth of the universe, and talk of "black holes" that swallow up galaxies, resemble legendary creation narratives and apocalyptic visions. The same quality of adventurous fiction surrounds what happens at the microscopic level. Even the human race's own reproduction seems mysterious when one encounters the models of understanding employed by modern genetics. It is the three-dimensional world we encounter in everyday life that is and remains the horizon of the human person's understanding. It is therefore before this judgment seat that the concepts of natural science and theology must present their case.

There are good grounds for pointing out that the natural sciences — thanks to their excessive differentiation and specialization — have lost a common, general platform for understanding *vis-à-vis* this judgment seat. When the mechanical models no longer suffice and attempts to build new models that catch the complexity and the development in the micro- and macrocosm are no longer comprehensible within the general human world of experience, then what takes place is precisely something along the lines of spiritualization. Natural-scientific thinking seems to need an anthropological interpretation and must be interpreted with a view to the human person's perception of reality.

This means, no doubt, that one can see the natural sciences as standing with their boots in the same bog as theology was observed to be standing in at the beginning of this century; one might feel some measure of *Schadenfreude* at this. The common fate provides motivation for an exchange on the human person's interpretation of the fundamental circumstances of his or her existence.

Creation theology under criticism

This century's controversies within the theology of creation have deeply marked the history of theology. One important part of the conflict was

Karl Barth's rejection of the *orders* of creation. This doctrine had developed in such a way that the idea of God as Creator legitimated certain time- and culture-determined societal orders and social institutions as willed by God. The inference was drawn directly from these institutions — if they functioned intactly — back to God's will. Karl Barth resolutely opposed this possibility of making connections from cultural expressions back to God. The idea of the orders of creation was also discredited because it had been used to support the Nazi's organization of society.

Independent of every accommodation to society dialectical theology worked with the question of how the human person encounters and grasps God's revelation through Jesus Christ. Still, in this way, it appeared that belief in creation had become overshadowed by the revelation in Christ.

Scandinavian theologians followed this development with a certain degree of disapproval. Above all Gustaf Wingren led the way in maintaining the genuine Lutheran view of the Creator as being active in the work of creation here and now, in conflict with the devil and destruction.

New attention and interest were paid to the idea of creation because of the elaboration of the theology of secularization. The modern, autonomous human person who takes his or her destiny into his or her own hands found support in something we might call a new version of the theology of order. The development towards modernity was interpreted in the light of the creation narrative's refusal to attribute divinity to the work of creation in itself. The theology of secularization considers nature as an instrument of and arena for the human person's lordship. It was precisely this idea of creation that gave the human person the freedom *vis-à-vis* nature that made it possible to subjugate it and to use it for one's own ends. Theology profits from the development towards the modern world. By becoming "mere nature", creation was laid as an instrument in the hands of the human person.

Still, in recent decades, this idea too has left a bitter aftertaste, since we have had our eyes opened to the obverse side of this lordship over nature. It is precisely this uncontrollable lordship that has led to the situation where nature seems to sigh for redemption. Ecological disequilibrium, the destruction of the rain forests, galloping drought, the hole in the ozone shield and the danger of death through overheating (unless the poisoning of nature gets there first), and the plundering of non-renewable resources are the outcome of human beings' lordship over nature. From a theological point of view, creation theology has for some time stood in a corner of shame because it had greeted this development positively.

Seen from this perspective creation theology has over a period of fifty years been accused of being blind and deaf in relation to attacks on human persons, and later to attacks on nature. Nevertheless, these accusations are directed against a *wrong* theology of creation. The urgent task now is to develop an ecumenical thinking about the work of creation that is not held captive by static societal orders or by a view of nature as a mere object for

industrial and mercantile exploitation. Since we believe that God holds up our world, we are obliged to produce a viable theology of creation in the encounter with an unhappy development both in nature and in theology. For there can scarcely be anyone who does not spontaneously sense that the overworking and exploitation of nature are in conflict with Jesus' proclamation and with the belief in the forces of renewal initiated by Jesus' resurrection. Precisely because "the theology of creation" has been overshadowed and has become something shameful, it is necessary to take up this task with renewed energy.

This does not in the least mean that theology has an autonomous contribution to make to the solution of the world's ecological problems. Still, perhaps theology can contribute to something that has gradually become exceedingly scarce: to provide good concepts, images and forms of understanding to interpret the human person's relationship to his or her environment. Without such interpretative models or clear images that give a perspective, we stand helpless before the development of nature. An appropriate interpretation of existence gives motivation to committed involvement in all areas: the liturgical, the political, the scientific.

Nature's control of itself — a utopia

It is most certainly an illusion to image that nature itself puts right the consequences of human beings' overworking and destruction. For what is in fact to be put right? All that which we consider from a human point of view to be ecological catastrophes are, in fact, natural processes. Even a dramatic change in the parameters of existence for species of plants and animals will take place as one link in a natural development. Even if there occurs a dramatic shift in the balance of nature to which human beings have become accustomed in the last millennia, there are no convincing reasons to believe that nature will fall back into this form of balance. For it is in fact such dramatic changes that we know from the past on our planet: species have developed and subsequently been wiped out, and the growth and development of genetic variety have not taken place without dramatic changes. It is only when one applies *a perspective* to this development that it can be assessed as favorable or unfavorable. It is only when we consider nature with the interest implied by a human perspective that it requires protection. Nature in itself does not need anything; it is not in need of protection since it follows its own laws blindly and straightforwardly.

Against this background it might appear problematic to speak, for example, about "the integrity of creation". For what is the integrity that belongs to creation? Is it today's situation minus thirty years? Or is it the golden age in the pre-industrial world? It is certain that nature itself cannot speak about this matter. Nature is in itself devoid of reason and without in-

terpretation. In this sense, there is still power in Protagoras' thesis that "man is the measure of all things". It is *the human person* who must interpret nature as his or her environment and evaluate the development in nature.

The expression "integrity" is necessarily linked to the *human person's* system of values, and comes more specifically from the idea of human rights. The human person evaluates certain situations in nature on the basis of his or her own imagination and needs.

In an age where the specialization in the natural sciences is so all-embracing and complex, there is great need for sketches of interpretative images that illustrate the situation in such a way that they provide a basis for human action. We are entering a situation where specialists who know most about the individual details of the complexity of nature and about the models for grasping the development of the universe often lack a language that links their observations to the human person's self-understanding.

This is not to be understood in the sense that theology's task is a kind of translation of scientific images of the world into everyday language. A first task for a theology of creation is to make a contribution to the existential understanding of the *human person's* situation *vis à vis* a nature that we experience as threatened, i.e., threatened as the human person's environment, the basis of the life we lead in an elementary sense.

At the same time, there is more to the idea of the "integrity of creation". Given that it is the human person who must evaluate which development in nature is favorable and which must be prevented, it is necessary to build up a reasonable degree of unity on the concrete goals. A slogan about the integrity of creation signalizes the position that there exist areas in which the human person ought not to intervene. Just as there are thresholds of inviolability in the existence of the human person for the sake of human dignity, so it is conceivable that there are situations and areas in nature that ought to remain untouched. Yet, how is it possible to establish in a practical way the thresholds of inviolability?

The clearest examples of zones of inviolability are protected natural parks in which animal and plant life is allowed to remain untouched. Corresponding ideas with a view to the preservation of some types of whales and seals have found wide acceptance in many parts of the Western world, mostly where the countries in question have no commercial interest in such catches. The idea of protection through legislation emphasizes that parts of nature highly prized by human persons must be preserved untouched. Many believe that this is done for nature's own sake, but this idea has little meaning. The meaning is, rather, that the human person decides to avoid intervening in particular natural areas because the *human person* finds it valuable that certain animal and plant species are preserved in their variety. For example the human person can regard genetic variety and untouched nature as good.

Such protected areas are, however, very small exceptions in the world as a whole. The true testing stone for a wise control over human beings' dealings with nature is given primarily in those areas of nature where the human person is also intensively active in establishing the basis of his or her own life: food, shelter, fellowship, culture. Arriving at an ecumenical thinking about creation in order to be able to evaluate the different criteria for the use made of nature is important.

Ingredients of a sketch — Karl Barth

The time has come for a renewed deepening in the Christian tradition concerning creation. If the goal is to be an ecumenical theology of creation, we must also develop the ability to link traditions. It seems useful to begin by presenting some motifs that have been dominant in the thinking about creation in my part of the world, with a view to discerning motifs that can be a fruitful foundation and which open the path to a continued dialogue. Despite sharp divisions and frequent conflicts on how creation is to be understood, it is also fascinating to investigate what it is that unites various theological constructions.

Although this may come as a surprise to many people, it was Karl Barth who in recent decades has had a great influence on the elaboration of the theology of creation. It is true that his intention was to take a clear stance as a zealous critic of the type of creation theology that he had encountered in those Lutheran theologians with whom he was in conflict during the church struggle. His political criticism was directed at their conservatism, which all too easily accepted established societal frameworks and norms as having been determined by God. The theological point of his critique was that the theology of criticism paved the way for a cultural synthesis in which the process of thought was employed to take hold of God. Barth saw this synthesis as an ambition which failed to take hold of its own object. *God himself*, who reveals himself in time, was lost to view. Barth was also critical of the distinction made between the hidden God and the revealed God, because language about God's hiddenness could be played off against the real point, namely that God *de facto* reveals himself. The theology of creation which he encountered also presented the problem that it was hidden in such a way that there was no respect for the living God's freedom in his revelation. This is why Barth made his problematic statements that theology stands there without any presuppositions of its own.

It is obvious, against this background, that his own theology of creation had to take on a dynamic quality of its own. The creation was set in a perspective viz., the *history* which God has with his chosen people: election. In the light of this shared life in history between God and human beings, it was possible for Barth to approach the theology of creation. The understanding of creation was set in a perspective of liberation, in keeping both

with Israel's understanding that God led the people out of their tribulations, and the first Christians' discovery that God who had chosen his people was the Lord of history who called all the peoples. Barth links the ideas of liberation and salvation, audaciously combining the perspectives by speaking of creation as justification.

Thus he gives creation a positive mark in the light of the goal God has set for created history. He speaks of creation as God's "yes". And this "yes" makes its mark on creation, on both its light and its shade. In his last years, Barth also spoke of natural theology in a positive sense, against the following background: nonhuman nature has an immediate relationship to God, and non-Christian human nature can mirror the liberation that Christ's work brings. This perspective of history becomes possible after Barth laid down a Trinitarian way of thinking which is specified in relationship to the course of history.

The provocative element here is that creation is apparently not given an inherent value, a dignity of its own on which redemption so to speak builds. However, at the same time, this is precisely what creation is *given*, in that Barth asserts that redemption is the inner reason for creation, while creation is the external reason for redemption. Creation's goal is disclosed in God's history with human beings, but precisely this goal lies there in creation. He can also take up Albert Schweitzer's fundamental concept of the "reverence of life" and agree with it, when it is made more specific with reference to this history. We may ask whether Barth's reservations about a theology of creation have not resulted in a greater measure of rejection than was reasonable on the part of those who make the obvious point that the creation is a presupposition for redemption.

Nature, history and liberation

In contemporary theology this overarching and dynamic concept of history, as applied to creation, has been taken up and elaborated. This is a move also in relation to new knowledge about the development of the universe and life on earth in a natural-scientific context, since it has been possible to point to a certain parallel. Thus, the concept of history can supply a fruitful perspective for dialogue on models developed in biology and physics. It is presumably equally important that this way of thinking can contribute to unleash the potential that the Christian tradition bears with reference to liberation, also with a view to environmental questions.

If natural history, in the light of faith, is the place where God is at work as Creator and Redeemer, the ethical consequences are solidarity and mutuality — and an implacable struggle against the evil that stands between us and the kingdom of God, the kingdom that brings the righteousness that hitherto and for the future is anticipated in Jesus Christ's life and death.

It is important to form ideas of *how* this presence of God is to be understood in the created history for the interpretation on human premises, the interpretation in faith. Here many attempts have been made, some of them speculative. Wolfgang Pannenberg, for example, takes as his starting point history as a whole, and attempts to see individual events as possible, provisional manifestations of God's presence. Jürgen Moltmann attempts to consider biological differentiation *and* human history as the *locus* of God's combative presence in such a way that where complexity, consciousness and communication increase, the traces are sensed of the Triune God, the Lord of history.

Although Karl Barth seems to be the source of inspiration of both these intellectual constructions he chose to see God's presence through the metaphor of *God's Word*. He develops the classical image of God's presence in the Word by taking hold of individual events and occurrences in life as elements in God's discourse. Seen thus, God's discourse is given an existential anchoring. Eberhard Jüngel has further developed this perspective by emphasizing the human person's constitutional openness in relation to the environment. The human person is fundamentally open to be addressed through words and events. In the light of revelation the elementary interruptions in existence, such as the expressions of love, become signs that the gospel has universal validity.

By using God's speech as the root metaphor, Barth knits together an understanding of creation which is specified in relation to the course of history, rests in the Trinitarian tradition, makes contact primarily with the human person's receptivity and perception, and then motivates to activity.

The fundamental phenomena of existence — interpreted by a theology of creation

The theology of creation has had a broad impact in the Scandinavian context. It is first of all the renewer N F S Grundtvig who must be mentioned: in the last century, not least through his rich composition of hymns, he established belief in the Creator as the interpretive framework for a romantic understanding of nature, and affirmed that one must be fully and completely a human being, anchored in the life of the people, in order to realize the Christian life in the congregation. He rejected a special Christian existence in the congregation that would be free and independent of domestic life and the life of the people. Grundtvig's reflections on what is given in the life of the people, in language and culture, has inspired much of contemporary Danish theology.

Gustaf Wingren has especially accentuated the perspective of conflict: God as Creator in strife with the powers that threaten life and the courage to live. His protest against what he interpreted as the Barthian forgetfulness of a theology of creation is, in reality, to a certain extent an expression

of the same commitment we encounter in Barth's liberation perspective on creation. Thus, it is not certain that the conflict is so very deep.

With his philosophy of religion based on a theology of creation, Knud E Løgstrup develops an exciting and independent alternative. His starting point are the fundamental phenomena the human person can observe in his or her own existence. He points to the dimensions that characterize a situation which is heavy with unspoken demands on one's neighbor, an anonymous claim. Ethical action and life itself are realized by taking up an authentic position over against the demand. He developed this line of thought later by extending this framework from existential philosophy. His attention concentrated on phenomena that he called the sovereign expressions of life. They are given along with life itself: confidence, mercy, openness. They are fundamental, definite and basic. They can be perverted and crushed, but they have an ontological precedence. It is precisely the discovery of these fundamental traits in human existence that opens the way to a religious interpretation of existence, such as Christianity gives. The special character of this line of thought is thus its analysis of the existing creation. It bears traces — faint, yet ineradicable — which point to a universal power that continuously holds it in being, the power to be in all that exists.

One problem in this way of thinking is its ambition to take in the whole universe. At the same time, Løgstrup attains his perspicuity entirely by means of an analysis of *human* existence. There is a certain tension between an intention to take in nature, and a restriction that nevertheless restricts the perspective to human nature and draws further conclusions on the basis of this. There is, I think, no way of getting round this problem. It creates difficulties if one denies that this problem exists, and pretends to have an ecological understanding of nature in which the interest of the human person does not stand at the center. Theologically this construction creates difficulties because the image of God loses clarity. The Creator God who emerges from the power to be in all that exists, is indeed a God rich in grace, the source of the spontaneous expressions of life, joy in the sensations of nature: but he is also a God rich in cruelty, since he is also the source of destruction.

By turning to history Løgstrup now chooses the same solution to this problem that we met in Barth. God becomes as it were a partisan in his work of creation, in the kingdom of God which came through the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. In this kingdom of God, the destruction and guilt that take place in history are set aright. Here we continue to have theological problems on which further work must be done, perhaps most fruitful from the perspective of a Trinitarian theology. Yet, despite all the differences in the way of thinking, we find impulses to think in terms of liberation also in Løgstrup's ideas about creation. That which is created exists, and has a goodness in its very presence that expresses itself in the sovereign expressions of life. Nevertheless, the threat to these poses the challenge of

an ethics of rescue: actions that imitate and prepare the way for the unfolding of the goodness which is deposited in creation. And where destruction nevertheless has the last word, the idea of the future kingdom of God is introduced.

The value of this creation theology is *inter alia* that it draws attention to the elementary joy perceived in the work of creation. Løgstrup takes his starting point in the most elementary of joys which exist independent of purchasing power, economic and social status. This review of an elementary phenomenology uncovers the special forms of rationality and control that dominate the so-called First World. The idea of lordship is assessed and measured, and withers when it meets the observation of the basis of existence that lies open for everyone. If one is to follow the usual procedure in liberation theology and evaluate the thinking on the basis of its effects, Løgstrup's construction receives high marks since it has inspired various and constructive attempts to work out the relationship between theology and the natural sciences, and the relationship between theology and the environment.

Further work in an ecumenical context

When presenting the various sketches of a theology of creation it is often necessary to accentuate the fundamental differences. These differences exist. At the same time, it is important to recognize that many motifs are common to the various concepts. It is essential to work these out further so that an all embracing and ecumenical dialogue about a theology of creation is possible.

First, we find a common interest in the dynamic relationship to history. This is a clear criticism of earlier versions of a static thinking about creation.

Second, a prominent place is given to the perspective of salvation and redemption in relation to nature and creation. This perspective is surprisingly strong, when we take into account the variations in contemporary theology.

There remains a great deal of work to be done in specifying more precisely in what this liberation and salvation can consist. Here we need a dialogue with the insights from the natural sciences, as well as a sober theological elaboration of how, in the light of faith, we can think of the goal of history.

Letting go of illusions is important. We neither can nor should take the side of nature against human beings' interventions. Our perspective is human. We see from the human being's point of view, and we use our own imagination — and faith's imagination! It is this imagination that gives reason to speak of the rescue of the work of creation and the integrity of the

work of creation. This perspective is distinctly limited by our nature and by our limitations.

One possible point of entry for further work is to see what is fundamentally at stake in the **conflict** in history, from what evils ought human beings to distance themselves in the light of faith? In human beings' dealings with nature many situations have a threatening aspect; therefore, it might be appropriate to sketch the outlines of what initially is to be avoided and rejected. Precisely these sides are seen so much more clearly when the good creation is threatened. If development is to be evaluated on the basis of the **goals** that present themselves in the light of faith, one obvious move would be to look for possible strategies to influence the development in the direction of the goal. An ecumenical theology of creation must hold the field of vision as wide as possible, in a renewed work of interpreting the liberating work of creation.

At the same time, faith gives the necessary calm in a difficult situation. The Norwegian hymn writer Svein Ellingsen wrote the simple verse: "Through Christ's work you will be strong and rest in God's future." This gives a fruitful and realistic perspective to our active involvement.

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THEOLOGY OF CREATION - A CHALLENGE TO CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Gert Nilsson

Commenting on the debate on the construction of a bridge between Malmö, Sweden and Copenhagen, Denmark, the editor of the largest newspaper in Malmö wrote in 1993 that according to several environmental experts the bridge would be bad for the environment. However, he continued, the main question was not whether it was beneficial or detrimental for the environment but, rather, whether it was good for the economy. If the bridge was good for economy, nature would have to be sacrificed. Fifteen years ago the Danish theologian, Knud Eiler Løgstrup, remarked that politicians always gave priority to economic motives. This, so Løgstrup, was today's big moral dilemma.

The Swedish philosopher, Ingemar Nordin, argues for a free market; a market without limits or restrictions. The state would not be able to impose restrictions and legislation in this area and nature is, and must be, free for disposition. Only a real owner, as for example a person or a company, can be a responsible owner of nature. It is their duty to manage their property so that it will yield profit. The human being is free to cultivate nature and at liberty to exploit and make money from natural assets and raw materials. According to Nordin, the first person or company to exploit a new area becomes its owner.

Nordin believes nature's resources to be unlimited and restrictions to be unnecessary. People must be free to use nature's resources as they wish. If, for instance, the owner of a lake also likes to fish, he or she has to manage the lake so that it sustains enough fish. If, instead, that person chooses to drain the lake and to turn it into a field, let it be so. Nobody has the right to tell the owner what is to be done. Nordin accepts only one limit, the free market. Landlords are free to do whatever they wish with their property. The only one valid restriction is that another person's property must not be violated.

This example illustrates how economic interests can dominate natural assets. Nevertheless, the economy does not take care of nature or human beings. Since "the business of business is business" the economy is a bad manager.

As an alternative model, I shall try to outline a theology of creation. This theology is in harmony with the biblical and Christian view of nature and human beings.

Creation and culture

First, we have to define the word "culture". In this text, the word culture denotes all human activities and their spiritual and material results which are passed on to future generations.

Thus, culture includes human beings' intellectual, scientific, technological and practical activities for which they are morally responsible. This responsibility has three foci viz., God, the neighbor, and nature. The inconsiderate exploitation of nature, a result of Western science and technology, is not culture but anti-culture.

Culture stands in contrast to the ideal of wilderness and the inconsiderate exploitation and impoverishment of the natural resources, the extinction of certain animal and plant species, and an irrevocable change of the genetic code. Culture is not a war against nature. On the contrary, culture implies the cooperation between human beings and nature to make available resources and possibilities to enable all people to lead a good life.

Culture presupposes morality, and morality presupposes a religious foundation. Still, culture also implies a spiritual view of life, not only a material one. The basic supposition for culture is stewardship. Human beings are stewards, not the owners of creation.

Culture is an activity that takes place in a specific context and depends on tradition, language, economic, and geographical circumstances. This does not mean that human beings are free to construct cultural patterns without restriction. All people have to respect natural law. In different parts of the world, culture manifests itself in distinctive ways. This multiplicity is important and must be respected. Therefore, mission in the sense of changing culture is not a Christian task. Nevertheless, it is important that the Christian church and individual Christians critique culture. One's own and other cultures must be critically examined in order to analyze and to reveal violations of the dignity of human beings and the integrity of the creation.

Consequently "to do" culture is humanity's vocation. When God created human beings as male and female, he in fact said, go and "culture" creation! To cultivate is a sign of human beings who, as a part of creation and cooperators of God, are called to civilize creation. This is God's command.

Nature has an intrinsic value, independent of humanity's civilization and cultivation. Nowadays, many people call for a ban on further civilization and cultivation activities. We should not be permitted to intervene in and interfere with creation. This poses a problem since, on the one hand, humanity has a special vocation to civilize and to cultivate creation and, on the other, human beings will go beyond the bounds of the allowable. We are going to overstep our authority as human beings.

Yet, going back to nature is not the solution. Since we are unable to return to a pre-cultural nature doing culture and civilizing nature remains humanity's vocation. We are thus obliged to clarify the limits between humanity's cultural vocation and the integrity of creation. These limits must respect human dignity and the whole creation. Within these limits, human beings are free to do culture, pursue science, develop technology and practice their knowledge so that they can live a good life.

Salvation and nature

What does salvation mean for nature? According to Romans 8, the whole creation longs for salvation. Nevertheless, this is not obvious in all Christian traditions.

According to Gnosticism, salvation is the liberation from *materia*. Much of theology has neglected creation, and for some Christian movements, salvation means a person's liberation from nature and its limits.

As the Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren points out, the original creation has a prominent position in the Christian faith. Therefore, the main task of theology is to replace creation in Christian faith and life. The reflection of Christian faith will start with the First Article of the Creed before it addresses the gospel. Still, and this is important, the First Article of the Creed will be continued in the second and third articles. A theology of creation must contain all the three articles of the Creed.

Christ has come to the world to renew the damaged creation. Therefore, the church and theology regard creation as a part of the Christian faith. Creation is a necessary part of Christianity and must also be an integral part of Christian doctrines. Then it may be possible to formulate an ethical challenge to the church, to science and technology, and to politics.

Life and future

The Christian doctrines of creation and salvation suppose a future beyond this time and this world. This constitutes a hope for creation.

In fact, creation is more than mere raw materials. Creation is on its way to death and resurrection. There is a future for all of creation. The Third

Article of the Creed is the article of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is sent to the whole creation in order to lead it to the goal which God has set for it.

According to the Christian faith, trying to shape the future world is meaningful. For Christians the Christian hope of resurrection and a future with Christ includes the mandate to protect, preserve and reconstruct creation, and to do culture in a responsible way — as human beings and Christians.

A challenge for Christianity

Pointing to the fact that the doctrine of creation is a necessary part of Christian faith challenges Christianity, the churches and theology. The human being is a steward in the world, a cooperator of the Creator, not the Creator. Therefore, it is theology's main task to define the human being's place in the world. What does stewardship mean today? How is creation used in a responsible way? Theology not only has to formulate an adequate anthropology but also appropriate doctrines of creation, salvation and a future beyond this world. "But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home." (2 Peter 3:13).

According to Romans 8, the salvation of the suffering creation is associated with the salvation of humanity. Thus, humanity's salvation has a meaning for the whole creation and is a task not only for theology and the church. Theology and the church have to carry on a dialogue with society about the moral responsibility of humanity's authority and stewardship with regard to creation.

BEYOND EXPLOITATION AND SENTIMENTALITY: CHALLENGES TO A THEOLOGY OF NATURE

Philip Hefner

I. The issue: where do humans fit in nature?

The question of how human beings are related to the rest of nature has inspired a vast conversation over the centuries, a conversation that has been limited neither to our own epoch nor to our own culture. The chief pivots of concern in this conversation have been: how should humans understand their relation to nature? Are we or are we not a part of that nature? How should our understanding of this relationship influence our behavior in the world?

Richard Wilbur, a former American poet laureate, has reflected upon this theme at some length, and in one of his shorter poems, *A Problem from Milton*, dating from the 1950s, he suggests that whereas in the Garden of Eden the rest of nature goes its course, unthinking, and with apparent zest, Adam drives himself to distraction in his effort to understand how he should behave and why.

In Eden palm and open-handed pine
Displayed to God and man their flat perfection....
And yet the streams in mazy error went;
Powdery flowers a potent odor gave...
The builded comber like a hurdling horse
Achieves the rocks. With wild informal roar,
The spray upholds its freedom and its force.
Poor Adam, deviled by your energy,
What power egged you on to feed your brains?
Envy the gorgeous gallops of the sea,
Whose horses never know their lunar reins.

"Flat perfection" characterizes the natural world apart from humans, because everything in that world goes its way unreflectively, unaware of whatever reins might govern its motions. It is humans who are the "deviled" creatures, and the devilment is connected with their brains. As reflective creatures, they have to ask questions of "Why?", questions of meaning, questions of where the reins really are and what they signify for the ways humans ought to live. The devilment that besets the human race grows out of our tendency to ask these larger questions, to fly to the heaven of ultimate meaning, since that flight to heaven turns out to be hell for us.

In another poem, entitled, *Mind*, Wilbur likens the mind to a bat that can fly all alone in a cavern.

It has no need to falter or explore;
Darkly it knows what obstacles are there,
And so may weave and flutter, dip and soar
In perfect courses through the blackest air.

Nevertheless, he realizes that his simile of mind to bat is not as perfect as the bat's sensors in the cave unless he adds something.

The mind is like a bat. Precisely. Save
That in the very happiest intellection
A graceful error may correct the cave.

The bat's perfection, like that of the palm and pine and ocean wave, lies in its unreflective accommodation to what it can do, within the confines of its environment. The human mind also seeks accommodation, but with the added dimension that at certain moments of both competence and graceful probing, even when its creativity errs, and mistakes what the environment's reins would require, that error may alter the environment in ways that render both the mind's probing and the cavern in which it weaves and flutters more perfect. This lucky fit — despite its resulting from a "mistake," or because of it? — Wilbur calls "the very happiest intellection."

In their present condition, so over-nourished are their brains, that Adam and Eve face the monumental challenge of discerning the reins that determine human life, where they are and what they require. This is not first of all a question of what will serve the biological perpetuation of the species, rather it is essentially *a question of niche* — Where do humans fit? and, What are the requirements and the possibilities of their niche? Discerning just what can constitute Wilbur's "happiest intellection" has become a question of our being or nonbeing, and thereby the question qualifies as thoroughly theological.

II. The impasse: belonging and alienation

The clear message from the sciences that we are kin to nature

The sciences provide us with a relentlessly vivid message concerning how we humans are related to nature: we are constituted by natural processes that have preceded us, we have emerged within the career of nature's evolving processes, and we bear indelibly the marks of those processes. In short, we are indissolubly part of nature, fully natural. At this late date in the twentieth century, the point surely does not require belaboring. In previous decades, it was chiefly the poets and philosophers who spoke of a unitary process of evolution that stretches from the formation of the universe (perhaps in what we call the big bang) through cosmic history to planet earth, the emergence of DNA, the emergence and unfolding of human culture, and on into the future. Today the scientists themselves are putting together that picture of evolution in comprehensive terms.

What are the chief learnings that we derive from the sciences concerning the relationship of human beings to the rest of nature?

1. *We recognize that nature has a history, and we owe both the fact and the form of our present existence to that history.* The model of kinship is appropriate for representing this intense interrelationship (Ode 1991). The concept of kinship points not only to our sibling relationship with the ecosphere, but even more to our primary continuity with nature's processes, and our origin and future within nature. The pertinent metaphors here are not so much drawn from ecology as from genetic kinship. The elements that comprise the periodic table we all learned in school, and which also form the building blocks of our own bodies, were produced in previous epochs of the universe's history, many of them in the monster furnaces of the galaxies. The concreteness that defines us bears the marks of life's pilgrimage on our plane *bricolage* — constructing new things from the materials at hand — is evident throughout the biosphere. Whether we note the formation of jawbones from antecedent gill slits or the triune structure of the human brain that contains within itself the neurological ancestry of reptiles and ancient mammals, it is stunningly clear that human being is a segment of a process that can be related reasonably, on the basis of empirical observation, to the whole of nature. When we add the testimony of genetics and the results of nucleotide sequence comparisons, including those that deal with mitochondrial DNA, the sense of our kinship within one human community and with the higher primates is rendered very intense indeed.

2. Alongside the image of kinship, we are also aware of the *ecological model* for representing the intense interrelatedness between humans and the web of the natural ecosystems in which we live. This model describes the structure of how we live with our natural kin. In some ways this is a simpler and more graspable image, particularly since the delicate balance

and interweaving of the many factors that make our continued existence possible on the planet become more vivid to us every day. Negatively, the dangers of disrupting this balance are also susceptible to vivid representation. Even though we presently still have not taken it with enough seriousness, our current thinking gives more attention to the ecological model. It is often a more palatable image than that of kinship, because it is less intense. It can be understood (though inadequately) as consisting only of external relations between us and the rest of nature, whereas the image of kinship insists upon a decisively internal relatedness. As an external quality, we often thereby render our kinship with nature as nonessential to our being as possible — we call nature our home, the house in which we live. We speak of our dependency upon nature, in the sense that it provides what we need for life. On the basis of these images, we like to think of humans as caretakers, stewards, creative dominators with respect to nature. These images do not carry the weight that *kinship* does, since that image suggests that we are part of nature, not on the basis of external relations, but in the *internal* sense; we are a segment of nature's own processes, and those processes have inwardly shaped us. The concepts of *bricolage* and the conclusions drawn from nucleotide sequence comparisons, including mitochondrial DNA comparisons, are not adequately imaged by models that emphasize external relations; they require the more emphatic images that arise when we speak of kinship and genetic interrelationship.

On the basis of these scientific perspectives, there can be little doubt that *homo sapiens* is nature's creature. How are we related to the rest of nature? We flourish only within an intimate ecological fabric, and within the relationships of that fabric, we are kin to the other citizens of nature's society. Our interrelatedness is best conceptualized according to the model of genetic relatedness. Nature's processes have produced us, we are constituted by our inheritance from its past and we live in the ambience of its creative balances today. There is a kind of non-negotiability to the message that science delivers on this point. Our kinship with nature is not a matter of our preference, nor is it an issue that calls for our acquiescence. It simply is.

The existential actuality that we are alienated from nature

Against the background of what our scientific understandings tell us, it seems very strange that the fundamental problem of our time is that we do not know where we fit into nature, nor how our patterns of living can be creative and also harmonious with the rhythms of the rest of nature. In those cases where we do have a glimpse of how the indicative of our kinship with nature is to be translated into imperative, we often resist and choose to go in different directions that seem to offer greater pleasure. As powerful as the knowledge and the experience of our belonging to nature is, we struggle with that belonging. We are creatures of culture — those

learned patterns of behaving and understanding whereby we create the world views and mores that literally put our worlds together and tell us where we fit. Our culture, enabled by our brains, rooted in our consciousness, and adapted to our bodies and their genetic evolution, does not allow us to exist as Richard Wilbur's "gorgeous gallops of the sea, whose horses never know their lunar reins." In the main, we have to discover those reins, clothe them in our own symbols, investigate them, define their bounds and their possibilities, and then decide how we want to relate to them. Our lack of proper fit with nature rests finally in this essential aspect of our character. We have to discover that which our kin in nature know by genetic programming. We distance ourselves from nature's laws through our symbol-making tendencies. We insist that what other citizens of our ecosystem must receive as imperative, we can treat as hypothesis to be tested and manipulated. The bat takes the cavern's walls of stone as absolutes to be observed; the human mind takes those same walls as proposals for negotiation and proceeds to compose a list of demands for presentation. And the process of negotiation is always accompanied by a significant degree of human error and lack of understanding.

What we are experiencing today is that we are poor negotiators; we have not understood just what proposals we ought to make. We receive the news about our ineptness in the form of what we call the "environmental crisis," and also in the forms of hunger, poverty, violence, over consumption and overpopulation. We are largely inept in carrying out "the very happiest intellection" that can allow us freedom and yet gracefully correct the cave to our benefit and that of the rest of nature, as well. Consequently, we exercise our kinship poorly, whether it be with our fellow human beings or the rest of nature. We are alienated from our natural kin.

Our alienation is rooted in our culture

The prevailing way in which we have come to understand our relationship to the rest of nature is through symbols that focus upon the possibilities nature presents to us for exercising our creative abilities and propensities for re-shaping it, to make it conform to us and serve us. In the main, we have symbolized our work upon nature as furthering its development and improving it thus placing the weight of the Good on the side of *doing unto* nature rather than accepting a place *within* it.

The primary instrument by which humans act upon the rest of nature is their culture, which is in effect a learned and symbolic system of information and guidance for behavior which in the human species must supplement the programs of information and guidance that genetic evolution has bequeathed to the species (Burhoe 1981, chaps. 6,7; Hefner 1993). Culture is a rich and manifold system of information that includes many facets; here I can speak only in very general terms that will ignore the differenti-

ated aspects of culture and their dynamics. To speak more specifically, the confusion and out-of-kilteredness between humans and the rest of nature centers in our inability to discover the proper correlation between these two systems of information and guidance, the genetic and cultural. The cultural system is the locus of the difference between the human mind and Wilbur's bat. It is true that just as the genetic system can be our undoing, when it guides us in maladaptive directions, so the cultural system can work at direct odds with the welfare of humans and the rest of nature. Clearly, our principle challenge is that of interrelating our genetic and cultural systems of information within the configuration of our present bio-sociocultural environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1986, 1991; Hefner 1993). The relationship of religion and science plays out within this framework of putting the question .

Our culture's symbolic impasse: caught between exploitation and sentimentality

When we recognize the pivotal role of culture in our current alienation from nature, then we can analyze more incisively the issues that confront us and our possibilities for dealing with them. It is culture that accounts for the strange discrepancy between our scientifically certain knowledge that we are kin with the rest of nature and the ideas rooted in our self-consciousness that we are out of touch with our niche, that somehow we do not "fit" with the rest of nature.

The task of shaping our cultural systems of information as they pertain to our relationship with the rest of nature is a demanding one that requires both careful analysis and comprehensive reflection. Today we find ourselves too often caught between images that are exploitative, on the one hand, and sentimental, on the other. Both ends of this spectrum find support both in secular and in religious thinking.

(1) On the exploitative side, we see secular understandings that by and large inculcate within us the sense that being "natural" or "only nature" is too little for creatures of our capabilities and attainments. The secular spirit prizes human beings for what they can do with nature, how they can manipulate and "develop" it. We could document this at many points in our past, but in our present century, the two great social philosophies of the twentieth century — democratic capitalism and communist socialism — both value persons on the basis of what they produce and what they consume, in materialist terms. Production is conceived in terms of what can be done with the natural resources at hand, and consumption is synonymous with how much of the human products can be taken out of nature and put into human possession so as to enable the possessor to live a life as unlike the world that is untouched by human hands as possible. Both of these great philosophies have left the natural world in a state of disrepair, violation, and little understood, except as resource for human creativ-

ity and manipulation. Our rituals of cosmetizing the living and the dead — which have spawned and supported two very considerable industries, to be sure — clarify our fear of being only natural creatures. Our technology speaks powerfully of our sense that leaving nature in its pre-human state is somehow a betrayal of our genius. With our technology we continually redesign our current artifacts, thereby rendering every previous achievement obsolete. We then proceed to make the current design essential to our lifestyle, leaving the “natural state” always farther behind in the past. The current high level of sophistication in the practice of medicine has brought this spirit of nature-altering activity to bear upon our very own bodies, our genetic constitution, our reproduction, and our minds.

Our Western religious traditions are more ambivalent about nature (Santmire 1985, esp. chaps. 1 and 10, pp. 216-219). On the one hand, they have most often been interpreted to be harmonious with the secular spirit. The exalted sense of human status as expressed in Psalm 8, for example:

what are human beings that you
are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for
them?

Yet you have made them a little
lower than God,
and crowned them with glory
and honor.

You have given them dominion
over the works of your
hands;
you have put all things under
their feet.

(Ps 8:4-6)

The creature who in the first chapter of Genesis was created in the image of God and given dominion over all things is echoed in this Psalm verse. Islam holds similar traditions, which may be summarized under the phrase, “God is, and man is his caliph” (Cragg 1968, chap. 2). Nature belongs to God, and it exists for humans, in their effort to serve God (Rahman 1980, 78-79).

In addition, our Western religious traditions also include perspectives on life that easily can be interpreted dualistically, urging upon us the view that our destiny lies not in nature’s world of flesh, but in some other world of the spirit. These traditions are represented in substantial numbers of individuals and communities who have graced the pages of history prior to and after the first century of the common era. These communities have in effect questioned whether the natural order and its viability should even be given consideration, since our final destiny is to be with God, quite independently of our natural life on planet earth. Better to burn, if that hastens the journey into Abraham’s bosom.

The cultural information that is conveyed by such forms as these — whether religious or secular — renders it difficult to conceive of human life as being in kinship with the rest of nature or of being in service to nature. As a manager of a leading U. S. chemical company once said to me, "God has given the entire biosphere as a resource for the enhancement, wherever possible, of human life. God has intended that the biosphere serve us, not that we serve the biosphere." Such approaches are marked by sheer instrumentalism and utilitarianism with respect to the natural world.

(2) On another front, we find cultural information that can be characterized as extreme sentimentality. This sentimentality ranges from sheer anthropomorphisms to uncritical ascription of sacrality to natural forms and processes, as well as to assertions of nature as a realm of divine love. Here, too, secularists and religionists alike indulge themselves. We find anthropomorphism, for example, in Peter Singer's scale of values which orders nature, focusing upon animals, according to their nearness to human beings in the capacity for pleasure and pain (Singer 1981, 120-124; also chap. 2). It may seem strange to term Singer a sentimentalist, but it seems merited when we consider that he lays the foundation for an ethic *vis-à-vis* the natural realm strictly on the basis of a flexible interpretation of the preference of the human species for its biological relatives. Much of the so-called "animal rights" thinking is based on Singer's strategy (Singer 1975).

The Gaia myth and other similar principles posit, without any real critical argument, the sacrality of nature. This constitutes a kind of positivism in that it exalts what is, on no other grounds than its actuality. As Singer turns the givenness of a preference to "our own kind" into a basis for prescription, so others reiterate an ancient custom of ascribing sacrality to the natural order in which we live, simply because it has generated us. The only compelling reason for considering planet earth to be worthy of Goddess stature is because it possesses life and has produced us!

It is common for religious groups to affirm the natural order as a realm of God's love, quite uncritically. One recent officially adopted Lutheran statement speaks of nature as a realm that God rules as Shepherd King — quite oblivious to the phenomena of extinction, predator/prey relationships, and the like. In this context, it is common to excoriate irresponsible human behavior with respect to nature as a sin against God that requires confession and forgiveness. At its worst, this sort of theology trails off into a form of "Be kind to nature" attitude.

III. The way through culture's impasse

We have described our culture's symbolic impasse in understanding how we are related to the natural world in which we live. The exploitative and the sentimental attempts to shape cultural information *vis-à-vis* nature are grounded in serious insights: that nature is a resource for human existence

and that it is a realm of value that deserves our respect, whether that respect expresses itself in ethical stances or in veneration and even in worship. Both of these tendencies are, however, not only inadequate, but also even dangerous, because they are not complex enough to take account of the fullness of our relationship to nature according to the images of genetic kinship.

In order to break the impasse I have described, we must forge new understandings that include the following concepts: (1) our kinship with all of nature; (2) the inherent capabilities of the natural order; (3) the future of nature; (4) the shape of human involvement in nature; (5) the poignancy of the relationship between humans and the rest of nature. A complex of cultural information that provides less than this will not be adequate to the issue of where humans fit in with nature and what behavior is appropriate to them. When one gives careful attention to these five elements, it is clear that what we are dealing with is nothing less than a full theology of nature. In what follows, I will sketch some of the resources that classical Christian theology offers for an adequate theology of nature.

IV. Elements of a theology of nature

Our kinship with nature is grounded in God's creative act

The fundamental logic of the Christian myths of creation ground all of nature in the free action of the loving God. The basis for understanding humans as kin with the rest of nature lies, in the Christian view, in the immediacy of God's creative work. There is no intermediary between God and the creative act of origination. Neither does nature undergo testing or struggle in its coming into being. For example, in contrast to some other worldviews, in the Hebrew-Christian view nature does not have to pass through an ordeal of chaos and ordering in order to come into being as creation. Nature is simply called into being by its Creator. This is the logic of the two Genesis creation stories, as well as the traditions concerning creation that are embedded in the book of Job, the nature Psalms, and in the gospels of the New Testament.

Humans are included within the process of originating creation, not apart from it. The second chapter of Genesis pictures the human being in terms of dust that has received the spirit or breath of God. A substantial segment of the Christian tradition has taken this as a model for conceiving of God's work throughout the natural realm. Sacraments have been defined as natural things with the addition of the spirit or promise of God. One may read from this definition in either direction: that human being is the paradigm for conceiving how God is present throughout nature and history, or that humans fit under the sacramental paradigm which applies

to all of nature. Christian understandings of the Holy Spirit have often moved in the same direction. The Spirit hovers over the waters at creation, just as it gives life to the desert plants and animals, raises up charismatic leaders, accompanies the birth of the Savior, and is poured out upon entire communities.

This logic is articulated doctrinally in the creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) — there is no other ground for nature's originating than God. The theological tradition holds, furthermore, that this origination takes place under the conditions of God's freedom and intentionality. These two factors are important, because they signify that nature has come into being as part of God's desire and will to create that which God truly intends. The Christian concept of nature's origination in the immediacy of divine freedom and intentionality is filled out when we consider that the God who creates is marked by perfect goodness and love. Nature, therefore, is what the good and loving God brings forth in immediacy in utter freedom and intentionality. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the New Testament speaks so often of redemption and salvation as new creation. In the doctrine of continuing creation (*creatio continua*), it is asserted that all of the richness of the concept of originating creation also marks the ongoing relation of God and nature through nature's history. Bernhard Stoeckle has called attention to the primacy of the axiom *gratia praesupponit naturam, non destruit, sed conservat et perficit eam* in the Christian view of nature. This can be translated in at least two ways: "Grace presupposes nature; it does not destroy it, rather conserves and perfects it" or "Grace undergirds nature. . . ." Both senses have been fundamental in the Christian tradition, and they carry three important implicates: that grace preserves nature, it does not destroy it, that grace is the foundation of nature, and that grace leads nature to its fulfillment (Stoeckle 1962, 18).

On the basis of God's creation work, nature possesses the continuing capability and suitability to be a vessel of God's presence and an instrument of God's work

The mainstream of Christian myth and doctrine depicts nature, in its natural state, even after Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, as a fit realm for divine presence and an instrument for God's action. The doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Jesus and the supporting dogma of the Two Natures of Christ support this capability of nature in fortissimo. The prime texts, dating from the mid-fifth century of the Common Era, are the Tome of Leo and the Formulation adopted at the Council of Chalcedon. What is noteworthy about these documents for our theme, is their vigorous insistence, to quote Chalcedon, that in the man Jesus we meet the divine and the human "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation — the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature

being preserved, and each combining in one Person" to do God's work (Hardy 1954, 373). This is a remarkable statement, particularly, as we shall see, in the context of the normative science of the ambient Hellenistic culture. In Jesus, the human remains fully and naturally human, without change, while the divinity is likewise uncompromised. The theologians never explained satisfactorily how this could happen and how it could continue, but that they asserted it is incontrovertible, and their assertion reveals the quintessence of the Christian confidence in the status and possibilities of nature. The sacramental theology of the mainstream is of a piece with the doctrine of the Two Natures of Christ. Real bread, real water, when understood within the promises of scripture can be vehicles for actualizing the grace they portray. The water of baptism depicts a cleansing that befits our fundamental nature as creatures from God, and the bread and wine of the Lord's supper present a nourishment that brings health to those same God-intended creatures. Nature, in this view, can be considered a means of grace. What is required is a certain framework that includes both interpreting the natural phenomena in light of the graciousness of God and also what the Reformers called "use," which means that the sacramental natural object must be related to humans in their actual existential situation. Nature does not bear the gracious promise in the abstract, but only in the context of my understanding that I share in that nature and participate in it. The Reformation of the sixteenth century did not maintain a consensus on these points, but Martin Luther insisted that the finite is capable of the infinite, and he considered all the phenomena of nature to be "masks of God" (*larvae Dei*). We remember that Luther would not have meant that God was to be found "behind" the natural things that hid God or stood between God and us. Rather, masks in classical drama are the figures they portray. If a boy wore the mask of a woman, he was a woman in the drama — not a boy wearing a mask, but a woman and representing her character in the drama. *Gratia praesupponit naturam*, indeed!

The future of nature is linked with the promise of the Kingdom of God

The Christian tradition has not been so clear about nature's future in God. However, its myth has insisted that Jesus was resurrected *in body*, not just in spirit, and we are to share in this risen bodiliness. One prominent ancient tradition, that of Saint Irenaeus, speaks of the final condition as a recapitulation of all of creation. Scripture speaks of the transfiguration of nature in terms of what we know here on earth: the heavenly Jerusalem, the lion and lamb lying down together, the warring nations all coming together to eat at God's heavenly banquet in reconciliation. The trajectory of the biblical faith and the myth of consummation asserts that the entire

creation will be brought to God's fruition, and the creation embraces the whole of the natural world.

Let me say a word about the view of nature that is set forth under these three rubrics. It is an exalted and expansive view of nature, valuing nature as creation, the realm that is conceived and carried out in love, with immense possibilities. My point is not that Christian faith and theology have always been perfectly clear concerning the exalted status of nature, nor that Christians have behaved in ways that accord with what I have described. Rather, I mean to call our attention to the fact that the coherence of the Christian picture of reality, its myth, and its fundamental doctrinal elaboration of that picture of reality contain within them an impressively strong affirmation of nature viewed in terms of its origination, its continuing life, and its possibilities — both as the cosmos of all created things and as the source of all created being. It is a view that understands nature to be grounded and sustained in the free intentionality of a good and loving God and also to be a fit vehicle for the expression of that loving God's will. We may more often think of the Christian emphasis upon Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, the Fall, and sin, together with Christ's rescuing redemption. That these emphases are present in the Christian tradition in full force and that they have been interpreted by Christians in ways that directly oppose my thesis, cannot be denied. The same Christians who hold these views of Fall and sin, however, also hold to the divinely willed origination of nature and its fitness for the incarnation and the sacramental life.

The shape of human behavior in this created natural order is that of God's created co-creator

The primary Hebrew-Jewish-Christian assertion concerning human beings is that they are created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*. There is no single authoritative interpretation of this assertion in the Christian tradition, but the parameters of its meaning may be discerned when we keep in mind that it is the natural creature of Genesis that is identified with the term *imago Dei*. Whatever else it might mean, the term speaks of humans as destined to actualize the presence of God within the created order. Elsewhere, I have proposed the theological anthropology of the "created co-creator" (Hefner 1993). Human beings have been created — both by the processes of nature, through evolution, and also by the intentionality of the loving God.

Particularly in their characteristic as creatures of culture, humans have been given the niche of being genuinely creating creatures. This creating niche is portrayed in Wilbur's poems. Unlike other creatures, humans are not told unmistakably what reins they must obey, they must themselves discern the reins. Unlike the bats, humans may alter the rules and contours of the cave, according to their own intentionality, but they are not in-

formed about the consequences — whether their alterations will qualify as disaster or as “very happiest intellection.”

Created to be co-creators, one might even say determined or “*condemned*” to be co-creators. What is the norm to guide their co-creating? The figure of Christ plays a role here. Christ is the logos, or rationale, of God’s intentions in creation; Christ is the normative image of God in the world; Christ is the embodiment of God’s will in and for the world. In the ritual of the eucharist, Christians are reminded, sacramentally, that the actions of their lives are called to be taken up into the very work of God, as set forth in Christ. Christ in this sense is the paradigm of the co-creator, the paradigmatic expression of the life that is appropriate to the human niche.

The poignancy of the relationship between humans and the rest of nature is depicted in the cross of Christ

There is an amazing degree of naivete and hypocrisy embodied in the symbols of exploitation and sentimentality. This naivete and hypocrisy are centered in the almost total absence of a sense of how we are shaped and supported by nature, on the one hand, and the mutual and reciprocal exploitation that marks all natural relationships, particularly that of humans and the rest of nature.

To the extent that we recognize our kinship with nature, we can deal with the first of these errors, since kinship images speak of our being shaped and supported by nature. The second issue, that of unavoidable reciprocal exploitation is more difficult. Carlos Fuentes, the Mexican novelist and man of letters has spoken of this poignant dimension of our engagement with nature in his commentary on the Spanish bullfight. The bullfight is a ritual of interaction between vulnerable nature and vulnerable humans.

The matador is a tragic representation of man’s relation to nature, the actor in a ceremony of remembrance of our violent survival at the expense of nature. We cannot refuse the exploitation of nature, because it is the condition of our survival. The men and women who painted the animals in the [prehistoric] cave at Altamira [in Spain] already knew this. Spain rips off the mask of our puritanical hypocrisy in relation to nature and transforms the memory of our origins and our survival at the expense of the natural into a ritual of bravery and artistry, perhaps even of redemption (Fuentes 1992, 23-4).

The matador does not vanquish the bull, the symbol of nature, but rather acknowledges ritually that humans are always killing nature in order to live, and that they do so, not as confident winners, but as vulnerable creatures themselves whose lives are also often defined in being maimed and killed as the ritual plays itself out. Fuentes’ is a prophetic voice that warns us against what he calls “the puritanical hypocrisy” that would sup-

pose that being kind to nature is enough, or that it is even possible to be kind in any simple or pure manner. Nature bears our smudge and shares our smell, and we bear the smudges of nature's blood, blood that nature has shed from the moment that we emerged from her womb and throughout our mutilating climb out of the caves into high tech civilization. In the face of the loss of nature, we gain a sense of the vulnerability of both ourselves and nature, and we see that we have been and continue to be accessories to the demise of both. We have not only been exploiters and wounders of nature, but we have been necessary exploiters, because our survival and well-being is at stake. We have literally scratched our living out of the flesh of our sibling, the earth.

The power and the awful beauty of Fuentes' description of the bullfight carries the strong scent of tragedy. Humans are destined to mutilate nature as a condition of their survival. Christian theology does not deny the depth of Fuentes' insight; on the contrary, it is acknowledged. Christian faith can transmute that truth, however. Fuentes' description of the ritual dance between nature bull and human matador, with an intentional nuance of the erotic, speaks of the matador alluring while deceiving the bull into an engagement in which the bull is summoned by the man to "an astonishing instant of a statuesque coupling, bull and fighter enlaced, entwined, giving each other the qualities of force, beauty, and risk. The mythic moment is restored: man and bull are once more, as in the labyrinth of Minos, the same" (Fuentes, 23). From this beauty comes death, certainly for the bull and potentially also for the matador. Death is unavoidable in the relationship between humans and nature.

The North American Lutheran theologian, Joseph Sittler, in speaking of "Christian theology and the environment" (Sittler 1972, chapter 6) employs images that are not so far from Fuentes. Sittler, however, brings to bear the logic of the Christian creation tradition, as I have set it forth above. This logic insists that, originating in the intentionality of the good and loving God, the creation is a realm, first of all, of grace. It is grace that defines the normative nature of nature. Concerning the ethical task with respect to the environment, Sittler asks,

That faith should forever have to risk the act of investiture of the whole in the power of the experienced redemptive occasion—is this not of the profoundest character of genuine faith? ... Faith, that is to say, when it becomes maturely conscious of the risk-character of its demand, is always an act of investiture of total reality with that vision, value, and meaning which has been granted to us in our encounters with the deepest, highest, and holiest. When that deepest, highest, and holiest is the presence and power of grace, and when the occasions of its life-sustaining gift are granted us within our residency within the nonhuman world-theater of our existence, the place and scope for the ethical is given along with the realm of the gracious (Sittler 1972, 118).

The point is a forceful one. Fuentes talked about the statuesque ritual coupling of the bullfight in which humans and nature are one, giving to

each other force, beauty, and risk, a coupling in which life and death, healing and mutilation are intensely reciprocal. Sittler is talking about understanding nature to be governed by grace and as a result of that understanding engaging in ethical action that follows the trail of God's grace, a trail leads everywhere and fills all the spaces available, in both the human and the nonhuman worlds. Mature faith will risk such an investiture, allowing grace to define the meaning of nature, because it is impelled to obey the call of grace. Further, Christians want to do more than simply add their "numerically modest voice" to the urging of the environmental cause. They see that "a change in the spirit of our minds" is necessary, and that requires "something vastly more than a combination of frightening facts and moral concern" (Sittler, 1972, 118). It requires faith that will not "translate down" "the power of events, presences, and visions, the total and holy understanding of man and God, man and neighbor, man and God's creation from their fiercely elevated and dynamic, steadily revolutionary reality" (Sittler 1972, 119).

This is the Christian vision of God's grace that Sittler is referring to, it is the Word of God that is a fiercely elevated and dynamic, steadily revolutionary reality, and as such it will not settle for the tragedy of the bullfight. Rather, its confidence lies in the will and grace of God that intend to break the vicious coupling in which humans kill nature as the chief strategy to forestall their own being killed. The Christian gospel is fundamentally a gospel of transformation, a change that is possible, real, and already underway through God's grace. If we claim that Christian theology is relevant to the environmental crisis, we are at the same time claiming that the millennia long ritual depicted in the Spanish bullfight can be transformed, that the spirit of our minds can be so transformed that our survival will not be defined at the expense of the rest of nature. This is a dramatic claim, one that not many people will accept. The claim is not worth making if it stops short of facing the challenge posed by the myth and ritual of the Spanish bullfight. Sittler summarizes in terms that are a direct response to the tragic vision that Fuentes has depicted:

This symbiotic coexistence and interaction of the risk of faith, the consequent investiture of the creation with a gracious possibility in virtue of the Incarnation, and an ethicizing of our regard for and our transactions with nature as still, despite man's rapacity and despoliation, a field of grace — this is proposed as a Christian theological pattern of a magnitude that matches the misery of our environmental debacle. (Sittler 1972, 118)

Sittler brought this all together in his concept, "care of the earth." Care is directed toward the earth who is our sibling. Care of the earth is an alternative vision of what can happen in the ritual of courage and risk that is acted out every moment in the coupling of vulnerable earth and vulnerable human being. Care of the earth is not Band-Aids, it is not a kind "Hello, I

want to say I love you." It is rather an investiture of the natural world in grace and of ourselves in the implications that flow from that investiture.

Underlying this theology of investing the creation with the vision of the Creator's grace is the self-giving life set forth by Christ as paradigm, culminating in the crucifixion. In a mysterious way, in some ways recalling the struggle of the bullfight in the *corrida*, Christ proposed that dying for the sake of the world can transmute death into life. The realism of brutality and symbiotic exploitation is not thereby overlooked, but rather confronted in the only honest way, death for the sake of transforming death.

V. The Christian view of nature and Western culture

For most of its history, Christian faith and theology articulated views of nature that were richer than the scientifically authorized concepts of its enviroing cultures. The Christian views asserted a higher status for nature than the cultures allowed and they described a panoply of possibilities for nature that seemed absurd to the cultures in which Christianity had emerged and taken root. A considerable portion of the encounter of Christian faith with the enviroing Western culture can be interpreted in this light. From the Demiurge myth of Plato's to the work of Aristotle and the world views of the mystery religions and Gnosticism, nature was viewed as intrinsically defective, held by many ancient philosophers and scientists to be bound by ironclad laws.

Historian Robert Wilken describes the situation in these terms:

... when Christianity did begin to appear in the cities of the Roman Empire and came to the attention of Greek and Roman intellectuals, the Christian view of God's will in creation offended Roman and Greek sensibilities. God, in the Greek view, dwelt in a realm above the earth, but he did not stand outside of the world, the *kosmos*. Earth and heaven are part of the same cosmos, which has existed eternally. The world is not the creation of a transcendent God. The cosmos has its own laws, and all that exists—the physical world, animals, man, and the gods—are subject to nature's laws. "Certain things are impossible to nature," said Galen, and "God does not even attempt such things at all." Rather, "he chooses the best out of the possibilities of becoming." (Wilken 1984, 91)

Here the difference between the Christian understanding of nature and that of the Greek culture is clearest: whereas Galen, like Plato, sees God bound by the iron laws of nature's necessity, the Hebrew and Christian view holds that the good and free God is the ground and source of nature and its laws. To the Hellenistic thinkers, the Christian view seems to be arbitrary and irrational. To the Christians, the Hellenistic view is reductionist, an inadequate vehicle to express the possibilities that they see in nature, with respect to its origins, and also to its present and its future.

Medieval and Enlightenment views of nature were also incapable of integrating into their assumptions the sort of amazing claim of Chalcedonian and Lutheran Christology, that the finite is capable of the infinite. Immanuel Kant's celebrated and influential categories of noumenon and phenomenon, which in effect validated the split between nature and spirit as two different worlds, in which the faith could find a "storm-free area" for its life — this was a culmination of the inability of the West to take the measure of the Christian understanding of nature.

VI. New possibilities for conceiving nature

The line of thinking that I am proposing understands that since Charles Darwin's work, about one hundred fifty years ago, the scientifically authorized concepts of nature have taken a dramatic turn that in effect radically rearranges our mental furniture. When I speak of a new era in science, I have in mind these major areas of scientific exploration and thought: Darwin's theory of evolution, marked by adaptation and natural selection and the developments that go under the term the "modern synthesis" that relate Darwin to Mendel, evolution to genetics and molecular science; the developments in physics that accelerated toward the end of the nineteenth century, including relativity theory, quantum mechanics, the thermodynamics of non-equilibrium systems, chaos, and complexity; cosmology, including theories of the so-called big bang and responses to it; the discovery of the DNA molecule, developments in genetics, including behavioral genetics, and so-called sociobiology; paleontology, primate research; the neurosciences; theories of biocultural evolution; and the sciences concerned with information and computers.

What is clear about the new views of nature opened up by these and other sciences in the last century and a half is that there has been an incredible deepening and expanding of our views of what nature is and what its possibilities are. I am not competent to discuss this deepening and expanding except in the terms of a lay person. In these terms, four factors seem to me to constitute what I call a radical turn in concepts of nature that are sanctioned in our scientifically informed culture today.

First, consider the nearly incomprehensible size of nature in time and space. Nature as *comos* is at least 12 billion years old and stretches over a universe so large that communication across it is impossible — comprised of more than a billion stars. The sheer quantity is not to be minimized as a mind-expanding dimension of our concept of nature.

Second, there is an equally startling dimension of smallness to nature. The microscopic, the molecular, the subatomic, the quantum levels of nature also make a forceful impact upon the mind's view of nature. The infinitely large and the infinitely small taken together remind us that common

sense experience is not a reliable source for perceiving and understanding nature in its fullness. Some of the most important things we know about nature defy common sense experience — that matter is mostly empty space, that matter is comprised of particles, that we share so much of our DNA in common with other species animals, that each of us is formed by 100 000 genes which, in turn, are comprised by three billion nucleotides.

Third, all of nature can be interpreted within a concept of evolution: cosmic evolution, terrestrial evolution, the evolution of the organism, and the evolution of culture. Further, that it is increasingly possible to conceptualize the entire history of nature, from big bang to us and beyond as belonging to a single process of evolution, as thermodynamic theory, for example, suggests. This process of evolution accounts for the interrelatedness of all things. Humans are part of this interrelated nexus — we are thoroughly creatures of nature.

Fourth, nature is capable of surprising and unpredictable novelty, full of possibilities that beggar the imagination: the possibilities of the singularity in which the universe was born — the big bang — include galaxies, stars, and us; that inorganic stuff can be the matrix in which life emerges; that DNA and our genetic material can convey the information that makes it possible for complex organisms like ourselves to emerge. The possibilities that have already been actualized in the huge continuum of cosmic and terrestrial evolution make older ideas of transcendence pale in comparison. Sheer matter, the material world, has been the arena within which novelty is exhibited in such vigor and breadth that our concepts and language cannot comprehend it or articulate it adequately.

Quantity, the inadequacy of common sense experience, the interrelatedness of all nature in a process of evolution, and the unimaginable richness of nature's possibilities — these may appear to the scientist to be crudely spoken, but they do begin to convey the fact that our science is depicting nature for us in terms that were unimaginable in comparison with previous epochs of Western history. I am sure that scientists here may say that I have been far too prosaic really to convey the mysterious and spectacular qualities of nature that they deal with regularly in their work.

Thirty years ago theologian Bernard Eugene Meland spoke about the impact of the "new science" on our concepts of nature. He welcomed them as "the opportunity that has been offered to us out of the accidents of history and the creative developments within the sciences to convey a fuller witness of faith than the discourse of culture customarily affords, certainly than the discourse of Western culture during the past three hundred years of our history has been able to make possible" (Meland 1962, 106).

Meland did not mean that the new concepts of nature opened up by the sciences in our time will lead directly to proofs for the existence of God, nor did he imply that the new concepts will attract converts to the faith in large numbers. What he meant was that Christian faith constitutes one of the elements in our culture that is committed to what John Polking-

horne calls "the deepest possible understanding" of reality (1988, 97). This commitment grows out of a conviction first of all that reality itself invites us to the deepest possible understanding, and that secondly such an understanding is the grounding for more wholesome living. Western culture's authorized concepts of nature have been a barrier to that deepest possible understanding, and this fact has been manifest in the science of the West. All persons who have been devoted to the deepest possible understanding have sensed this defect — not just Christian theologians, but all profound persons, including many scientists themselves. What gives hope to theologians in particular about the new era in scientific understanding of nature is the possibility that this barrier to the deepest possible understanding of reality may at last have been lifted for us in the West.

Wherein, then do the liberating effects of new scientific concepts appear? This must be stated as carefully as possible, because it will prove to be the statement of agenda for attempts to fashion an adequate Christian theology of nature. *The new concepts of nature are liberating for Christian faith, and also to our entire culture, because they offer possibilities for understanding and describing the qualities and functions of nature in ways that are more adequate for conceiving how humans are related to nature and the human niche in nature.* No scientific theory can render a judgment on a particular natural phenomenon or process as a bearer of grace or as a candidate for interpretation in sacramental perspectives or about the destiny of the human species. When, however, Christians speak about the nature that they perceive as a vehicle of God's gracious action or sacramental presence, they should now receive new insights into that action and presence, be more able to describe that nature in terms that are commensurate with scientific understandings. Similarly, all persons, Christian or not, will find the views of nature that are authorized by science today are more capacious for conceptualizing the richness of human self-consciousness.

This question of how religious affirmations and theological formulations relate to scientific statements and theories is, as we know, a controversial one. This may be a version of what has been called "consonance" between theology and science. Ernan McMullin, who is often cited as the source for such views, speaks of the Christian intention to "aim at some sort of coherence of world-view, a coherence to which science and theology, and indeed many other sorts of human construction like, history, politics, and literature, must contribute" (McMullin 1981, 52). He goes on to say that theology and science are thus consonant in the contributions they make to this world-view.

If we accept McMullin's description, then my train of thinking might be that the scientifically authorized concepts of nature in the first eighteen centuries of Western history after the emergence of Christianity made a coherent world-view extraordinarily difficult. The Chalcedonian texts to which I have referred several times may be read as very intense efforts to establish a coherence; but they failed, because Hellenistic concepts of na-

ture, deriving from the Timaeus, simply would not allow the presence of ultimacy, divinity under the forms of nature in the manner in which the dogma of the Two Natures of Christ asserted. Today, scientific understandings of nature do not affirm the Incarnation, any more than they did in the fifth century of our common era. I would suggest, however, that a nature that can include the occurrence of a cosmological singularity like the big bang, from which radiation gave rise to particles, atoms, molecules, galaxies, and planets; and a nature that can embrace the notion that inorganic chemicals formed the matrix in which life emerged, and in which the DNA molecule finally shows itself to be so powerful and productive as to instruct the formation of the human species — these concepts of nature will not be a barrier to the religious affirmation that nature can be a bearer of ultimacy, that nature can contain the possibility of grace.

VII. The outcomes of a theology of nature

1. *In order to undertake an adequate theology of nature, both the natural sciences and theology must shake off misleading stereotypes from the past, concerning each other's basic understanding of nature.* Christian theology stands in a tradition that has wanted to appreciate nature more than earlier epochs of thought would allow; the natural sciences are now describing nature in terms that beggar the conventional imagination. The two parties must recognize this about each other.

2. *An adequate theology of nature will teach us how to talk about ourselves as intrinsically part of the processes of nature.* We speak uncertainly at the present time, because we fear that being part of nature's processes will diminish us. We mis-conceive that the distinctively human will be reduced to the prehuman. We are what the processes of nature can and have become. We are to be construed as part of nature's probing to determine just what it can become. This does not diminish the creativity that marks the human creature, due to its cultural dimensions, but it rather clarifies what the creativity is and what its natural function is. Nature is illumined as much by scrutinizing and gaining insight into what it has become in *homo sapiens* as when, conversely, we seek to understand human being by studying non-human nature. Our knowledge of nature, far from diminishing human nature to the laws of biochemistry, illuminates the significance of nature as the progenitor of *homo sapiens*, who in this context we would want to name as the diviner of ultimate meanings within the natural processes.

3. *An adequate theology of nature understands that what we are, what we do, and what we aim for, as humans, is to be referred to the processes of nature and to their future.* Our very existence illumines what the processes of nature can become, precisely because we truly are what the processes of nature have become. We must begin to recognize that that is our

chief significance as creatures and the most decisive guideline for the motivation and directing of our actions. A very great transformation in our conception of values must take place in this connection, because we do not generally consider the enhancement of nature's processes to be an adequate object of our motivations and actions. A decidedly non-instrumental valuation of nature is called for.

Jesus' life and death as the church interprets them serve as a model at this point. His life and death were not instrumental to his gaining any particular value for himself. They constituted his career trajectory (if we may use that term), and as the Temptation stories tell us, his life and death were rather of intrinsic value. He lived and died for the benefit of those with whom he came in contact; he did what he did for the sake of benefiting the world by witnessing to and obeying what he believed was fundamental truth. In the community where I worship on Sundays, after we present the gifts of bread and wine and money prior to the holy communion meal, we often pray: "With these gifts we offer ourselves and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made." In that prayer, we articulate the intention to accept the model of Jesus' life and death as normative for our own.

We must learn that this is what our lives, as part of nature's processes, are reckoned against: how they appear when measured against the ultimate well-being of the natural process from which we have emerged and which has shaped us to become what we are.

4. A theology of nature must recognize that, in light of our status as a phase of nature's processes, our niche can also be understood as one of preparing for the best possible future for those processes. In their cultural life, humans fully implicate the rest of nature in the human adventure. At the same time that we define this human project, we are also defining the rest of nature and molding it to the contours of that project. The shaping of human culture must now take as one of its primary considerations what is the best possible future not only for humans but for the nature-human complex. The model of education or child-rearing may be pertinent here, although it serves as only a limited analogy. The emphasis is not so much on molding the children to become what we want them to be, but rather contributing to them that which will provide the greatest possibility for a wholesome future, so far as we can make such judgments. Such is the character of our responsibility toward the rest of nature.

5. A theology of nature must help us discern the dimension of ultimacy in nature's processes and how to conceptualize them. Humans are the discerners and the conceptualizers of ultimacy, and this is both our being and our office in nature's processes, as they have brought us to this point in time, and also in their future unfolding. We are not nature-worshippers as some ancient peoples were. We distrust the term "survival," if it refers simply to the biological perpetuation of life, because we suspect that if that is what nature is up to, it is not enough for us. We also know that the phases

of the natural process do not last forever. Extinctions are the rule in nature. Species die out, grass flourishes and dies, to be thrown into the oven. But the process of nature's continual changing or evolving does not. In the Western religious tradition of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, the creation of the natural order is the greatest project toward which the divine creativity and energies have been expended, so far as human knowledge can ascertain. These processes are intricate and marvelous. They are, apparently, what God wanted to do. And redemption of all sorts is, after all, another — perhaps the humanly most significant — large outpouring of divine energy and intentionality toward the natural order.

If this is the case, that nature is God's great project, then devoting ourselves to its care and redemption is but pouring our resources into the same effort that God has poured the divine resources into. The spiritual life has not been properly understood nor has God been rightly obeyed, therefore, until the believing community pours the quality of effort into the processes of nature and their future that parallels what God has committed to those processes.

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COLOSSAL CHALLENGES TO THEOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF NATURE'S SACRAMENTALITY

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Abstract

The theological crisis has exposed the insufficiency of those models of human existence that would separate life from the nature in and around us. Theology, a culture, although perhaps a culture only because of the language in which most theological discourses are framed, is patterns of thought that seek to put people in touch with nature with nonhuman nature.

In this article, I seek to capture a third possibility, namely that of an alternative ontology of reality, one that opens to the most intense human discovery between human and nonhuman nature. This then is deeply rooted ecological change of the human nature. In essence, in the ecological sense, why we find a symbol that immediately integrates that which is most deeply has been severed between God and the human being (the Christ), words and elements in the act of sacramental, nature and nature for the sacrament of human and other, a new personal faith and communicative love.

The re-emergence of these elements is shown to be present in the last phase of Luther's exclamation: the last, preserved amidst the real presence of Christ (1538/1539). More, Alexander (1974) in particular, he says it through Christ, he is present in Luther's thinking, objects are united while in a state.

This article of theology develops the search for "ontology" to be drawn from nature so that in order to an international language of thought in the sacramental events, God's personal, but hidden sacrament is transformed into localized, but revealed personal persons. The sacrament

NATURAL EVENTS AS CRYSTALS OF GOD — LUTHER'S EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF NATURE'S SACRAMENTALITY

Niels Henrik Gregersen

Abstract

The ecological crisis has exposed the insufficiency of those models of humanity that isolate human life from the nature in and around us. However, a similar (although reverse) fallacy may result if the response to our ecological experience is found in patterns of thought that seek to minimize human interference with nonhuman nature.

In this article, I wish to explore a third possibility, namely that of an interactive concept of nature which focuses on the most intense forms of interplay between human and nonhuman nature. This idea is deeply rooted in biblical visions of the human-nature interface. In the eucharist especially we find a symbol that consistently integrates that which traditionally has been seen as opposites: God and the human being (in Christ), words and elements (in the act of communion), culture and nature (in the elements of bread and wine), interior personal faith and communicative love.

The co-appearance of these elements is shown to be present in the late phase of Luther's eucharistic theology, centered around the real presence of Christ (1524-1528). *Vom Abendmahl Christi* of 1528 in particular, reveals a thorough Chalcedonian structure in Luther's thinking: opposites are united while left intact.

This mode of thought abandons the search for "analogies" to be drawn from nature to God in favor of an incarnational structure of thought. In the sacramental events, God's general, but hidden omnipresence is transformed into a localized, but revealed presence *pro nobis*. This transforma-

tion does not occur due to an active possibility of matter but only by virtue of a passive capacity elicited by the sovereign action of God.

According to this view, nature does not in itself make up a sacrament. Yet, through the self-communicative actions of God, natural events may become sacramental actions of God, in Luther's own words: the *Crist-all*s of God.

1. The failing sense of cosmology in modern Protestantism

One of the aims of the Reformation movement was no doubt the abolition of cosmic-religious mediators between God and human beings. Luther's Reformation was born with the intention of liberating faith from the feeble and bankrupt elementary spirits (cf. Gal 4:1) to which Christian tradition had long enough been enslaved. In medieval theology and spirituality, the Virgin Mary and the saints prayed intercessory prayers for the sins of human beings. For Luther, the Mother of God becomes the human archetype of genuine Christian faith and gratefulness to God (cf. *Das Magnificat*, 1520-21). According to the medieval world view, the angels performed well-defined cosmological functions. Vicarious for the providence of God, the spiritual powers steered the perfect movements of the planets and stars (M Wildiers 1982, 19-58). According to Reformation theologies, angels were to be the spiritual messengers of the Word of God to the elected human beings.

This message of the freedom of faith, free from all intermediaries between God and humans probably constitutes one of the central breakthroughs of Protestant theology. This catharsis of thrust is hardly compatible with recent attempts to re-divinize our physical universe. However, the recovery of the freedom of faith is also one of the most ambiguous legacies of the Protestant churches of today. Seen from an historical perspective, the abolition of any intermediary structure between God and humanity has led to a failing sense of the cosmic embeddedness of human existence.

It is probably more than a mere coincidence that the anti-naturalistic attitude of nineteenth century liberal theology and twentieth century existentialist programs of *Entweltlichung* and *Entmythologisierung* have been articulated primarily by Lutheran theologians¹. Since Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube*, no theological cosmology has been developed in the leading Protestant theologies². The theologies of existen-

1 Ole Jensen (1975) has shown the persistence of this anti-metaphysical and anti-naturalist attitude from the liberal theologies of Albrecht Ritschl, esp. Vilhelm Herrmann's, to the theologies of the Word of God, esp. Rudolf Bultmann's.

tial encounter with God have neglected theological cosmology and discarded the contributions of the natural sciences to a theological re-appreciation of nature. In an age of ecological awareness, the Lutheran churches are obliged to exercise self-criticism with regard to their own *Wirkungsgeschichte*.

Since the 1970s, much theological work has been devoted to recovering the resources that may help us to transcend a personalistic ontology (e.g., Paul H Santmire 1985). However, quite often ecological theologies demanded the general human withdrawal from nature, with the aim of keeping human technological interventions to an absolute minimum. Yet, could it be that the value of nature also shines forth most abundantly in and through the interpenetration of human and non-human nature? In the following pages, I shall attempt to unravel some aspects of Luther's eucharistic theology that may stimulate such a positive appreciation of the interaction between human and nonhuman nature. Of course, Luther's interest is primarily theological, his ontological reflections being subservient to his theological concerns. Nevertheless, by articulating how God in fact does want to communicate Godself through the natural-cultural events of baptism and eucharist, Luther recurrently points to some general experiences with nature, both as parallels to the sacraments but also as manifestations of God's redemptive action.

I shall attempt to analyze this Lutheran resource for an ecological theology in two steps. Hermeneutically, I shall focus on some aspects of Luther's theology in order to show how his theology of creation and his eucharistic theology are coherent, not only in their theological intent but also in their ontological presuppositions (II). I shall then review some recent discussions on the sacramentality of nature and outline an interactive concept of nature that avoids simplistic oppositions of humanity and nature (III).

II. The general character of Luther's theology of creation

The theocentric perspective and the interpenetration of biological and social life

In his theology of creation, Luther often reflects the Augustinian distinction between *uti* and *frui*:

Thus, God has given all of us creatures for our use and utility but not for our adoration and religious worship³.

2 A penetrating and alarming analysis of this state of theological poverty was already made by Langdon Gilkey in the early 1960s, Gilkey 1961 and 1963, pp. 182-190.

Obviously, such an Augustinian clause does not satisfy the need for a re-appraisal of nature in today's context. Nevertheless, it is still worth noting that Luther's denial of the divine character of the cosmos does not discard an aesthetical enjoyment of nature. In today's language, the meaning of the "use of nature" seems to comprise both the instrumental use (like using a mountain as a place for digging ore) and the enjoyment of nature as having a value in itself, apart from our instrumental use of it (like valuing the mountain as it stands for itself where the end of our valuing is the experience of the mountain itself). In our interactions with nature, we are far from always being anthropocentric; in the aesthetic experience we are ec-centric.

In this respect, the theocentrism of Luther's theology even retains an impulse for a re-appraisal of nature. For the fundamental distinction between God the Creator and the created beings does not only shape a spirituality of humility over against God; it also constitutes an important resource for the humility of human beings *vis-à-vis* their fellow creatures. On the horizontal axis we are at one with other creatures.

This might be the reason why Luther, in his catechetical instructions on the First Article, always articulates an interpenetration of the three important life-spheres of human existence: the sphere of individuality, the sphere of social life, and the sphere of cosmic conditions. Both the personal and the social life is a life in the midst of corporeality and sensuality. In this respect, human life is only *primus inter pares*:

I believe that God has created me and all that exists; that he has given me and still sustains my body and soul, all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with food and clothing, house and home, family and property; that he provides me daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life, ... (Small Catechism. See, *The Book of Concord*, ed. and trans. T Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), p. 345.)

We face here a consistent togetherness of organic, social and personal pictures that focuses upon the basic needs, common to human and animal life. This being the case it is intelligible why Luther's theology of creation is structured to such a large extent as a theology of vocation (G Wingren 1952). For it is in the concrete places of vocation, primarily in marriage and parenthood and in our daily work, that human beings are coping both with the sexual nature that they are in themselves, and with the environmental nature that is to be taken care of by human beings. In the "catechetical tradition" of the Reformers, the doctrine of creation is centered around the experiences of daily life without special concern for the

3 Ad Galatas 1531/35, WA 40 I, pp. 176, 16-19: ... *non ad cultum et religionem*.

question of possibly a common, rational basis of faith (C Link 1976, pp. 16-19).

From the instrumental to the expressive character of creation

Compared with other Protestant traditions Luther's theology may be said to retain a reserve of theological possibilities since he insists on the principle of *finitum capax infiniti*. According to Luther, God's marvels in creation are not only of instrumental or aesthetic value but they may also be expressions of God's intention and will. As *larvae Dei*, created beings are God's partners with whom God wants to cooperate although God could create without the help of creatures (WA 17 II, 192). Luther even designates the *larvae* as the "faces of God" when disclosed by the Word of God⁴.

Theologically, this means that creation can also be seen as a part of the work of *Deus revelatus*, although not from the perspective of a natural theology. It would appear to be an overstatement when Luther in *De servo arbitrio* uses a terminology indicating that there in fact are two Gods, a revealed and a hidden God, fighting against each other (esp. WA 18, 685 = Cl. 3, 177, 31-39). Luther in fact commits himself to only one God, the Creator and Redeemer, but God acts freely and, from a human point of view, mysteriously even in the midst of God's very self-revelation⁵. Thus, there are works of God which by themselves are not expressive of the intention and will of God (*opera Dei abscondita*). Still, if it is true that Christ is the self-revelation of God there does not and cannot exist a separate hidden God (*Deus absconditus*) behind the revealed God.

This means that the world of nature contains ambiguous traces of God. Nature is both a sign of the wrath of God in the distortions and annihilations of created life and, in the regeneration of the distorted life and in the recreation of annihilated meanings, a sign of the generosity of God. As Creator of the world of nature and social life, God is the source of both light and darkness, of well-being as well as of woe (Isa 45:7). Consequently, not every cosmic and social episode discloses the inner being of God. What God, according to Isaiah, says about the sinful ways of human beings, also applies on the distortions of nature: "...my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways ..." (Isa 55:8).

4 Ad Galatas 40 I, 174, pp. 1f: *discernit faciem a verbo quam larvam divinum*.

5 cf. E. Jungel 1980, pp. 227f: "...die Unterscheidung zwischen *Deus absconditus* und *Deus revelatus* wird durch die Beziehung von dreieinigem Gott und offenbarem Gott so überlagert, dass der *Deus absconditus* unmöglich als eine die Offenbarung Gottes problematisierende Instanz aufgefasst werden kann".

Refusal of natural theology, appraisal of nature

This ambiguity is one of the reasons why Luther, from the beginning, refused "natural theology" as a path to gain knowledge of the true God. Natural theology, conceived as an argumentative rational system, belongs to the *theologia gloriae* (*Heidelberger Disputation*, 1518). Still, knowledge of God is not at our disposal. Knowledge of God is not an issue of skill or theoretical speculation but a gift that arises out of faith and love which, in themselves, are gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, Luther never fought against the idea that happenings in the natural world may become a testimony of God in nature when and where it pleases God. An argumentative system of natural theology is one thing, another thing is the sudden experiencing of God, through the Holy Spirit, in and through natural and social events⁶. The believer — unlike the natural theologian — can hear the voice of God "in the artisan's workshop, in the fruitfulness of a mother's womb, and even see God in the stone of a peach!" (WA TR 1, 574). This is an ever present possibility of a *theologia crucis*. From the revelation in the crucified Christ, the Christian expects that God wants Godself to be known, and that God wants to be found in the miniatures of ordinary life. In this context of expectation, the believer is able to *re-cognize* the traces of the incarnate God. With this preamble, Luther reassures the old notion of the "book of nature":

The whole creation is the most wonderful book or Bible wherein God has described and painted himself (WA 48, 201).

III. Christ in the crystals of nature: Creation theology in *Vom Abendmahl Christi*

The correspondence between Luther's *theologia crucis* and theology of creation comes to the forefront in his view on the real presence of Christ in the eucharist. God is not only, in a general way, omnipresent in the created corporeal world, but also works of God in creation can, from the point of view of the believer, be recognized as expressive of God. But more than that: God has instituted bread and wine as sacramental means of God's own self-disclosure for the sake of the redemption of humanity.

6 W. Pannenberg rightly distinguishes the argumentative systems of natural theologies from the possibilities of a pre-theoretical "natural knowledge" of God (Pannenberg 1988, 83-93; 121-132). In the case of Luther, one has to distinguish further between the knowledge of God that is 1. given by though mediated through the pre-theoretical experiences of the natural and social world, and 2. the knowledge of implied by the human existence itself, without divine self-disclosure. Luther affirms a natural knowledge of God in the first sense but denies a natural knowledge of God in the second sense.

Thus, systematically speaking, one may distinguish between God's general presence using created beings as *instruments*, God's manifestation of God's creative will through the *expressive signs* of created beings and, God's self-disclosure through the *efficient sacramental presence* of God's incorporating grace in the word-and-elements.

Now Luther in fact entertains a very persistent form of philosophical reflection on the real presence of Christ⁷. Recurrently, he follows the strategy of dazzling human reasoning while pointing to ordinary experiences that reason can neither understand nor deny:

Here faith must blind reason and lift it out of the physical circumscribed mode into the second, uncircumscribed mode which it does not understand but cannot deny (LW 37, 221; WA 26, 334).

This strategy seems to presuppose a correspondence between our ordinary experience of natural events and the sacramental reality of the eucharist. But since experience has a wider range than reason, it will not be possible for human reason to conceive of this correspondence.

Already in the *Sermon von dem Sakrament...wider die Schwarmgeister* of 1526, Luther makes this surprising statement:

If it were possible and I should measure all creatures and describe them in words, you would see wonders just as great, nay, even greater, than in this sacrament. (LW 36, 338; WA 19, 487).

According to Luther's further considerations in *Vom Abendmahl Christi*, Christ can be present in nature in at least three ways. First, in his bodily existence where his body takes up some place *vis-à-vis* other bodies and their places; this was the case during the Word's incarnation on earth. Second, in an inconceivable spiritual way by penetrating bodies without disturbing or interfering with them; this was the case when Christ was resurrected through the heavy stone of the tomb. Third, Christ, in his personal unity with God the Father, exists outside the created order, yet at the same time he is - as transcendent - immanent in the creatures, "so deep and near in all created beings" (Cl. 3, 400,15-401,16 = WA 26, 335-36). For through his resurrection Christ is at one with the omnipresence of God.

Luther, of course, knows of the inconceivable character of this real presence. But he does not fall back upon some a-cosmic christological paradox. Rather, the statement of the real presence of Christ all over the world of nature, is founded on the implications of the First Article of the

7 It is the merit of still inspiring E. Metzger (1948) to take Luther's eucharistic theology seriously as a — partly — philosophical project.

Creed.⁸ This foundation in a theology of creation is the reason why Luther is able to point to some undeniable experiential analogies in the mode of philosophical explication:

I am not speaking now from Scripture. But we must use our reason or else give way to the fanatics. (LW 37, 224; WA 26, 337).

Practically speaking, we are used to seeing events and happenings as "ordinary nature" in our daily lives as unbelievers although we live in a world of wonders. Warmth and sounds, for example, penetrate bodies analogously to the way Christ penetrated the stone of his tomb (the second way of the real presence of Christ). But still more elaborate are the phenomenological analogies to the mysterious divine omnipresence (the third way of the presence of Christ).

Luther highlights his thoughts with the example of a crystal which I take to mean more than a mere analogy of divine real presence. Rather, from the purview of Luther's sacramental realism, Christ is present "in, with and under" the appearances of the stones like crystals. Luther hints at the play on words between the German *Christall* and the presence of Christ in all, the "Christ-All". Inside a crystal, one can observe a kind of flash of light, and if one turns the crystal around, one will see the one and the same flash situated in different places in the one and same crystal (Cl. 3, 401,37-402,20 = WA 26, 337). Luther still formulates himself in the language of analogies:

... should I not be able to say, "See, there is the body of Christ actually in the bread," just as I say, when a certain side of the crystal is placed before my eyes, "See, there is the spark in the very front of the crystal?" (LW 37, 224; WA 26, 337).

However, considering both the play on words and the incarnational ground structure of Luther's sacramental realism, it would be possible, for the believer, to see the light flashes as instances or manifestations of the self-revealing omnipresent Christ. In the wonders of nature, the faithful are able to recognize some of the innumerable ways in which Christ, "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12) *manifests* himself also outside the instituted sacraments.

The same goes for the voice of a human preacher: he or she has only one voice but the voice is apprehended by five or ten thousand ears at the same time; if God can do this with a mundane voice, how much more will

8 cf. das Christus leib zu gleich ym hymel und ym abendmahl sey. Und ist gegründet eigentlich ynn dem ersten artickel, da wir sagen: "Ich gleybe an Gott den Vater allmechtigen schöpfer hymels und der erden", Dass diese Wort Christ "Das is mein Leib" noch fest stehen of 1527; WA 23, 153.

he be able to perform wonders with his own eternal Word (Cl. 3, 402, 21-37 = WA 26, 337f)? In this example, Luther still uses a mundane analogy to the real presence of God. But in the *Sermon von dem Sakrament...* of 1526, Luther takes the further step of seeing the real presence of Christ in the hearts of the believers as realized *in and through* the preaching of the mundane preachers: in the same way as a human voice can be present in ten thousand ears, the one and the same Christ can be present in even more human hearts (WA 19, 489,9-490,9).

Again, think of a mirror: as long as it is unbroken, you see only one face in it; but if it breaks into a thousand pieces, you will see a thousand faces in the pieces of one and the same material substance (Cl. 3, 403,7-19 = WA 26, 338). This again is an analogue to God's *in-esse* in the world. "Nothing is so small that God is not smaller; nothing is so big that not God is bigger" (Cl. 3, 404,33f = WA 26, 339).

However, God does not want to be found in the general everywhere-ness of space. God wants to be sought in specific places, namely in the instituted sacraments. In this sense, Luther does not give any license to talk about "nature as a sacrament" in any general sense. However, the believer might possibly recognize the many faces of Christ in the piecemeal of natural events. Following Luther's intention but transcending his terminology we could talk about the possibility of sacramental manifestations of Christ outside the instituted sacrament.

This position has to be explicated with some care. According to Luther, no intrinsic sacramental qualities exist in the natural events themselves (not even in the *gestalt* of bread and wine!). But *natural* events may be transformed into sacramental events, becoming the media of God's self-revelation to human beings⁹.

This interpretation is in accordance with the radical implications that Luther draws from the Chalcedonian Creed. In *Vom Abendmahl Christi*, Luther accentuates the Chalcedonian Creed saying that one cannot divide God and humanity, since God never takes leave of the humanity of Christ; what was united in one place, during the incarnation of the Word in Jesus, will be united forever but without confusion.

This would leave me a poor sort of Christ, if he were present only at one single place, as a divine and human person, and if at all other places he had to be nothing more than a mere isolated God and a divine person without the humanity. No, comrade, wherever you place God for me, you must also place the humanity for me. They simply will not let themselves be separated and divided from each other. He

9 cf. the terminology proposed by Paul Tillich (1963, 121): "The largest sense of the term denotes everything in which the Spiritual Presence has been experienced; in a narrower sense, it denotes particular objects and acts in which a Spiritual Community experiences the Spiritual Presence; and in the narrowest sense, it merely refers to some 'great' sacraments in the performance of which the Spiritual Community actualizes itself".

has become one person and does not separate the humanity from himself as Master Jack takes off his coat and lays it aside when he goes to bed (LW 37, 219; WA 26, 333f).

This text is, of course, a strictly christological text on the unity of the person of Christ. Nevertheless, according to Luther's view, the unity of the person of Christ implies a unity in the work of Christ. Luther also in fact spells out explicitly the universal implications of the Chalcedonian structure: in the concluding "Confession" of *Vom Abendmahl Christi*, he develops a Trinitarian theology where the inner nature of God is displayed through the consistent character of God's actions. Immanent and economic Trinity coincides: the Triune God persistently performs actions of self-giving love in creation (attributed to the Father), in incarnation (the Son) and in the continuous inclusion of the faithful into the very being of God (attributed to the Spirit). Even creation is seen as the place in which God (also the Father!) bows down, and gives himself in, with and under the gift of existence:

These are the three persons and one God, who has given himself to us all wholly and completely, with all that he is and has. The Father gives himself to us, with heaven and earth and all the creatures, in order that they may serve us and benefit us (LW 37, 366; WA 26, 505).

It is well known how Luther opposed any theology of glory that wants to penetrate from the order of creation into the heart of God; here Luther maintains a divide between a theology of creation and his theology of redemption. Nevertheless, it has rarely been recognized how the Chalcedonian structure of Luther's theology actually enables him to bridge the divide between creation and redemption — from the point of view of the revealed God. In the re-creation of God, the right hand of God takes over where the left hand leaves. And the left hand of God, the works of creation, works with an eye on what the right hand of God is going to accomplish: the unity of God and creation, "without division, without mixture"!

Luther's interactive concept of nature

When spelling out Luther's ideas in a more general way, it would appear that Luther always focused upon nature as centers of activity; he does not perceive nature as dead matter. And even more: it is in the interaction between nature and human beings that the substances of nature are transformed, in the most intense way, into events of activity and may become bearers of divine meaning and even of redemption. *Luther is interested in nature as fractalized but interactive centers of happenings.*

A mirror is normally conceived as a dead thing (and it surely is!) but in the event of mirroring — in the unbroken relation between the mirror and human (or animal) attention — it becomes active. It is the same with

sounds and voices: they may be labeled as material waves (and they surely are!) and ears may be labeled as mechanical systems (as sense organs certainly also are!) but in the event of listening, sounds and voices are transformed into messengers of meaning and the *spiritual presence of God in the local events of nature*. Luther is not only interested in analogies of nature that point to an absent God; he focuses upon instances or manifestations of the God who wants to be present. And God wants to be present not only in the ubiquity in space, but in manifesting Godself at a concrete time and in a specific place.

Thus, it is not nature *per se* that is the focus of Luther's interest. It is in the interactions between prehuman and human nature that the capabilities of matter are most expressive and open for a sacramental use by God. In short: it is events that matter, and it is matter that comes to grow into events. The substance of reality is not behind the appearances; rather nature reveals itself in the phenomenological qualities.

Even if Lutheranism takes a stronger position on the principle of *finitum capax infiniti* than most other traditions, I should like to add here that Lutherans are here in a deep-rooted consonance especially with the Orthodox and Anglican traditions (cf. Per Lønning 1989, pp. 166-177; 230-250).

Additionally, there are remarkable similarities between Luther's reflection on the nature of the eucharist and some more recent ecumenical texts on the Lord's supper. The Leuenberger Agreement of 1973 declares: "We cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking" (art. 19). Similarly, the Lima Document of Convergence of 1982 underlines that already the sacramental elements of bread and wine are "fruits of the earth and human labor" (On the eucharist, art. 4). Not only the acts of eating and drinking presuppose an interaction between human and non-human nature; the same applies to the elements!

IV. Conflicting interpretations of Luther today

Between cosmic romanticism and institutional restriction

Coming to this conclusion, I would like to point to the shortcomings of two recent interpretations of Luther's reflections on divine omnipresence.

The first misrepresentation consists in a massive generalization of Luther's intention. I think here of proposals in favor of a sacramental view of the cosmos as a whole, declaring the omnipresent Christ to be redemptive in every inch of the created cosmos. This interpretation seems to me to neglect the fundamental distinction between the general presence of God (in the categories of space) and the localized manifestations of God

(in the categories of specific places). *God is omnipresent but not sacramentally manifest everywhere.* God remains hidden in the experiences of distorted or annihilated nature. In the distortions of nature Christ only reveals God *sub contrario* in the Spirit's pleading for us by articulating our inarticulate groans (Rom 8:26). Thus, the romantic re-divinization of cosmos does not listen to the suffering in the natural and social worlds that are not and cannot be manifestations of the heart of God.

The other interpretation is more restrictive in claiming that Luther, after all, only proposed some analogies from the created order; these analogies are in no sense revealing of the real presence of Christ in the world of nature, since Christ is *only* present as grace in the instituted sacraments or in the spoken words of the gospel.

This interpretation is no doubt closer to most texts by Luther than the Romantic one. But an institutionally constrained reading is not only fruitless with regard to applications to many of our questions of today, but it does no justice to the full implications of Luther's radical re-interpretation of the Chaldonian and Trinitarian Creeds, either. The recurrent strategy of Luther, we have seen, is to *re-localize the eucharistic wonder in the wonderful world of man and nature*. If Christ is really present all over the created world, the analogies between the self-disclosure of Christ in creation and the natural events are analogies on the same level, both corresponding with each other and representing each other. The light flash in the crystal corresponds to Christ as the "light of the world" but is also an indication of God's self-manifestation to the believer; the thousand faces in a thousand pieces of the mirror correspond to God's billions of faces in the vessels of creation, each being a sign of God's will to disclose Godself; the voice of the preacher that pertains to five thousand ears corresponds to the self-disclosing reality of Christ in the billions of human hearts, but the voice is also the means of the sacramental presence of Christ.

Luther's analogies are not only a play of metaphorical interactions without ontological reference. God's self-revelatory redeeming action takes place in the crystals of natural events, given for human beings (where else?). But God's self-revelation does not happen in the general order of nature, but always in the miniatures of daily life; here specific interactions between human and non-human nature take place that have qualities conforming to the God who speaks in words and through the tacit elements of the sacrament.

In this reading, Christ manifests God the Father here and there but not everywhere¹⁰. It happens in the instituted sacraments and in the natural

10 Thus, the notion of God's "general revelation" in creation is a chimera. The very idea of revelation contains the notion of an unexpected event.

events that God pleases to use as God's sacramental means - *ubi et quando visum est Deo* (CA V)¹¹.

A second look at the Madras Statement of 1992

This interactive view of natural events may cast some light on the 1992 Madras Statement on the Lutheran version of a sacramental approach to nature (cf. Mortensen, "From a Liberated to a Reconstructed Creation").

The statement should be appreciated for the carefulness with which it states the sacramental character of nature in terms of possibilities: "God *can be* encountered in the most lowly things of life" (author's italics).

However, the statement seems to me unclear in two respects. First, the statement does not distinguish between the general presence of Christ in creation, and the sacramental presence by which Christ uses some specific natural events as embracing divine grace. It is not enough, I think, to say that "all things in creation, in both nature and history, can be bearers of divine presence". A theology of creation must insist on the point that we cannot conceive of creation without presupposing God's presence in the very web of nature: "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jer 23:24; cf. Ps 139). I shall refer to this as the principle of creation realism. This principle is not only a philosophical one, implied in the notion of God as infinity¹². Creation realism also has the religious importance of articulating that we, in the very fabric of our existence, depend on the real presence of God. In the Catholic tradition, Anselm formulated the principle of creation realism in the following words: "Where God is not, is nothing" (Monologion 14). Thomas Aquinas took the same ontological stance by his affirmation of the *existentia Dei in rebus* (ST I, q. 8). Luther is actually a follower of the Catholic tradition of philosophical theology at this point. Therefore, it is not sufficient to say that "trees and stones...can be the masks of God". They are the masks and vessels by the very fact that they are created in the immediacy of God the Creator.

Another case is the question of God's presence as embracing grace in creation. Here we can only talk in terms of possibilities, and the Madras Statement rightly refers to Luther's principle of *finitum capax infiniti* at this point. However, here we face the second ambiguity in the Madras Statement. In what sense are natural or social events capable of becoming the

11 The notion of *ubi et quando* is not restricted to the preaching of the church as it is obvious from the idea of "the cloud of witnesses" in Heb 11. cf. also Luther's own comment to the Cornelius-episode in *De servo arbitrio* (Cl. 3, 236 = WA 18, 739).

12 Thus, the immanence of the omnipresent God in creation is not derived from revelation but is contained in the very notion of the infinity of God. It is one of the merits of Wolfhart Pannenberg (1988, 429-433; 444-456) to have underlined this point in continuation of Hermann Cremer (1897).

sacraments of God i.e., efficacious signs of grace addressed to a reception by faith? The concept of possibility, in this context, should not be understood in an Aristotelian sense i.e., as an inbuilt capacity of created beings. Rather, the meaning is that God has instituted the natural world in such a way that it may be turned into sacramental means of grace, if the abundantly innovative God, the companion of creation, wants to do so.

Here we meet an even more intimate interaction between God and the world of nature than in the realm of the general real presence. On the one hand, nature is born with an array of propensities for possible material constellations of which some, if they were actualized¹³, would be sacramental. However, only if God inspires the events and turns them into sacramental events, do the natural events become the crystals of God. Events of nature are sacramental not through of their inherent material substance but only through qualified interaction with human beings.

For example, the sun shines every day as part of God's created order; but only in the interaction with the human being who is overwhelmed by the warm and embracing light, may the natural light become a tacit means of sacramental presence. From moment to moment, we are doomed or justified by our rejection or reception of the light as efficacious sign of the grace of Christ.

Or, when reading a novel, we become partakers in the power of inspiration, Christ.¹⁴ Nevertheless, we do so only in the immediacies an aesthetic awareness of a new presence that is happening to us. Or, we see animals confined to the narrow space of our animal household, and we are doomed or sanctified by our neglect or our awareness of the inarticulate groaning of our fellow creatures, the crystals of the crucified Christ. The eucharist is the "sacrament of love". But neither Christ, nor love, can be confined to the interior of churches.

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13 I could here refer to the theological theory of inbuilt propensities by Arthur Peacocke (1993, 65-69; 152-157).

14 For a further elaboration, I may refer to the many observations from aesthetic and communicative experiences in George Steiner's rich and provocative book on "Real Presences". Steiner's thesis is: "...any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, [...] any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analyses, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence" (G. Steiner 1989, 3). In all cases, it is the characteristic immediacies of the "happening to us" (1989, 179) that is the experiential resource for a sacramental understanding of natural events.

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CROSS, CREATION, AND ECOLOGY

The meeting point between the theology of the cross
and creation theology in Luther

Vítor Westhelle

I.

When in 1967 Lynn White Jr in his article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", charged the Judeo-Christian tradition with the attitude developed in the West toward nature, he set fire to a theological circus overly concerned with keeping the christological performance on the central stage. Even if he did not point directly to christocentrism as the fertilizer feeding the roots of the ecological crisis (as others following his steps would), the message was well understood: theology, too much focused on the *homo perditus et Deus salvator* has, in its relationship to God, lost a more incisive view of nature (human included).

A theocentric perspective in theology followed the criticism of the so-called "Unitarianism of the Second Article" (H R Niebuhr). Consequently, theologies of creation began to exercise the muscles of the atrophied classical dogmatic *locus*. Proposals went from renewals of Thomist infrastructural approaches to *quasi* pantheistic views of nature and creation as an "original blessing" (M Fox) or as mother earth incestuously raped by her own children.

The prominence of the theology of the Word in Protestant theology caused the resurgence of a theology of creation with some peculiar characteristics. As opposed to the Roman Catholic tendency to regard nature as a somehow positive epistemological *datum* for the construction of the knowledge of the relationship between Creator and creature, Protestants tended to favor a negative epistemological view. Even if there was some resistance to a radical rejection of natural revelation (the case of E Brunner vs K Barth), the significance of creation was focused on salvation history: creation as the first act of salvation.

Until very recently the suspicion that a theology of creation seeped away the energies of theologians who were failing to take seriously enough the political challenges in the history of suffering prevailed in the political and liberation theologies. A "green" theology would not blend with a "red" theology, until the peoples of the Amazon rain forest and other indigenous peoples of the world vindicated the urgency of having what could be called a "brown" theology.

Despite the strong emphasis of the Reformer on the theology of creation, there has been a clear embarrassment in the Lutheran tradition in dealing with this issue. With the exception of some major works in the last three or four decades (e.g., H Bornkamm, P Watson, R Prenter, J Sittler, D Löfgreen) Luther's emphasis on creation has been much filtered through the *Ordnungstheologie*, whose heritage is a static view of nature allied to some political and ideological uneasiness. Lutheran theology attempted to regain credibility and relevance with the works built on the theology of the cross. Luther's concern with creation was largely dismissed as a well intended, even insightful inventory of theological motifs, but not systematized enough to serve as a foundational theological argument.

The difficulty of linking Luther's theology of the cross — with its assertion that "God is not to be encountered but in suffering and in the cross" — with the theology of creation — with Luther's affirmation of the double knowledge of God¹ — is a point of conflict and dispute. The distinction between special and general revelation as a way of interpreting Luther's *duplex cognitio Dei* has been regarded with suspicion by those who consider the cross as the radical Christian specificum, constituting both the identity of God and God's relevance for the definition of God's immanence and divine economy.

On the other hand, uneasiness has also been felt by those who esteem the restriction of God's revelation to a Christian specificum to be a hindrance to the growing awareness of ethnic, cultural, and anthropological relativism or, to the ecological sensitivities eager to read the divine hieroglyphics in the book of nature. Are these two incompatible ways of organizing a Lutheran theology?

II.

I would like to suggest that the basic difficulty I have pointed to concerns the conceptual distinction and articulation between the visible and the

1 At Deum non inveniri nisi in passionibus et crucem. WA 1.362, pp. 28f.

2 Duplex est cognitio Dei. WA 40 I, 607, p. 28.

Word, between creature and Creator, the outer and the inner, between what the senses register and reason draws together, and what grace reveals to the heart. I shall use these sets of categories instead of the common approach of situating the issue in the relation between the First and the Second Article of the Creed because, before it becomes a dogmatic problem as such it is an epistemological one. It refers to the mode of cognition of, and the constraints for, the knowledge of God. Therefore, the correct *locus* for this discussion is revelation and not primarily creation or redemption.

In Luther there is a paradoxical and asymmetrical relation between the two sets of categories within which Luther operates to formulate his understanding of the *duplex cognitio Dei*. By paradoxical I mean that one (the visible) points to the other (the Word) but is in it simultaneously negated or contradicted. It implies the rejection of analogical reasoning with apparent analogical correspondence, i.e., its mode of argumentation is ironic. By asymmetry I mean that what appears to be the case in one set of categories is not simply reflected in the other, but is shaped in the other in unexpected ways.

Let me exemplify this with some of Luther's well-known imagery. Particularly in his commentaries on the Psalms we find affirmations that nature is full of parables, metaphors, and signs. He will deny nevertheless that through them the Creator can be known. In fact even what is seen is de-based if not seen through faith. Only faith can see creation³. That means that the view we have of nature is simultaneously our blindness to creation. Between one and the other there is no analogical leap. The "mechanism" through which we link creation and Creator cannot be grasped externally.

The famous metaphor of nature as a mask (*larva*) or wrapping (*involutum*) of God points to the same ironic mode of reasoning. This can be understood better if we go to the origin of the mask metaphor. It is worth remembering that Luther adopted the motif of the mask from the medieval carnival. Here the mask served as a means of caricaturing reality, revealing it but, at the same time, concealing it in its reverse. The mask presented popular projections of social and political life with burlesque resources within the space of the festival. Nevertheless, restricted to that space, it also concealed the true social relations in everyday life: it provided a glimpse of the "unseen" and intentionally distorted it. Nature is the carnival of creation.

The same goes for the wrapping motif: it reveals a presence while denying to sight any evidence of its content or even of its existence. The wrapping is all to sight, but it also blinds one to the essential. The one who

3 WA 38.53, p. 24f.

receives a wrapped present is convinced, if at all, of the existence of an unseen content by trust alone in the giver.

The visible things (*visibilia*) do not allow for any direct or indirect access to revelation, but they are what simultaneously makes it directly and indirectly present. In the visible God's presence is a "mediated immediacy" (J Bailie). Still, this very affirmation attests only to God's utter absence. To rely on natural reason for evidence or indications of God's presence will reveal only the idol of the heart (*idolum cordis*)⁴. The visible becomes an idol if it is seen as a directly reflected image of the unseen so that the gaze of the beholder is captivated by it. Yet, at the same time, it can become a "picture" of the unseen when the gaze does not stop at, nor is frozen in, what is presented to sight, even if it cannot go beyond it to have a direct vision of the unseen. An oxymoron, like "mirroring transparency," is here required to convey the intended meaning. What is reflected is not the visible presence as such, like in the reflection of a mirror, but it is an absence manifested in the reflection.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the visible is indifferent or neutral with regard to the knowledge of God. The *Deus vestitus* — the potential idol⁵ — is simultaneously that which protects us from the *Deus nudus* — the irresistible abyss of being. The clothed God is the representation of that which cannot be represented. By affirming its very absence it simultaneously offers the experience of a presence. The clothed God is the God of religious experiences by which humans open themselves up to whatever transcends real existence while at the same time closing themselves off to the radical experience of otherness.

Such is the importance of the "majesty of matter"⁶: it prevents our knowledge to convince us of the need for God's self-revelation through the Word. In this sense the double knowledge of God is affirmed, even though in paradoxical and asymmetric terms. What Luther said about the efficacy of the liturgical elements is exactly what could be said about the visible in general: not because of them but never without them⁷. God, as Luther would state it in the Heidelberg Theses⁸, is neither to be seen nor sought behind creation, nor to be inferred from it, but only to be recognized in and through it. However, this "in and through" would again be misleading were we not to understand that that which creation "reveals" is the concealment, the absence of God or, our blindness to the divine reality.

4 WA 14.587, p. 30.

5 WA 31/1.250, pp. 24f.: "der Teuffel wird und ist kein Teuffel, er sey zuvor Gott gewest."

6 WA 39/II.4, p. 32.

7 WA 19, pp. 72-73.

8 WA 1.354, pp. 17ff, (theses 19-20).

Behind the notion of the *Deus absconditus* lies the conviction that the visible in general presents us a clothed God who, as such, remains a mystery. The *Deus absconditus* is not to be taken as an axiological statement alone that accounts for the presence and the role of evil by manifesting God's strange work (*opus alienum*). For Luther this is also an ontological statement. God is not only hidden in wrath, but in fact hidden in the external things in general! The reason that the concealment of God is realized in God's wrath through the *opus alienum* is because it is through evil, in particular, that one comes to realize the failure to come to know God through the visible. This means that God is hidden in the beauty and goodness of nature, and also in ugliness and evil. The point is that it is tempting to find evidence of the divine in goodness and beauty whilst simultaneously rejecting evil as a pedagogue. This amounts to idolatry. Not because beauty and goodness are false instructors, but because they become false projections of the heart when separated from evil and ugliness. The goodness I see outwards conceals the evil that lies *absconditus*, inwards. And the reverse is also true: the evil I see outwards reveals the goodness that lies inwards.

For Luther evil is not beyond God's infinity. Hence, there is only an epistemological primacy of the *opus alienum* in the knowledge of God. God should not be praised for the greatness of creation in spite of evil; God should be praised in the midst of evil where God's continuous creation works out of the annihilating force of evil. Because of this force — the nihility of evil — God's creativity is manifest in and through it. It is this creativity, then, and not evil itself, that makes the knowledge of God possible. This is the fundamental thesis for supporting theologically the *creatio ex nihilo* within the negative Augustinian view of evil as the sole absence of goodness (*privatio boni*).

A call for responsibility grows out of the awareness of our sinful condition. For Luther, nature did not fall, but suffered the curse of evil because of human failure. "Not only in the churches, therefore, do we hear ourselves charged with sin. All the fields, yes, almost the entire creation is full of such sermons, reminding us of our sin."⁹ Therefore, the point in Luther's use of the mask motif is not as much to stress that God is hidden, as to underscore that we are hiding ourselves by not recognizing this mask for what it is, either by trying to get a glimpse of the face behind it or simply by ignoring it.

The hidden God raises a mask in which humans recognize themselves as in a deceptive mirror, for it reveals the other side of the goodness creation has been endowed with. Humans are called to recognize themselves in it, in its beauty, and from its sinister side. The *Deus absconditus* is then also

9 WA 42.156, pp. 24ff.

the *Deus revelatus* because God's concealment, once recognized as such, prompts the emergence of the *homo revelatus*. Therefore, the Reformation's outcry for letting God be God corresponds to the motto "let nature (human included) be nature." Auschwitz, Hiroshima, or the hole in the ozone layer are the masks of God raised for our self-recognition, in which we measure ourselves as much as in the lilies in the fields. The nature we see is the mirror image of what we have made it, or have allowed it to become. Nevertheless, in the experience of evil we do not have the mask as such, but a fissured mask in whose clefts we have the terrible sight of the abyss of being. This is why evil, as a cracked mask, becomes a pedagogue: by its cracks we know that we are not looking at a face, and through them we know that there is no pretty face behind it.

III.

If the visible is the projected side of our own inner beauty and hideousness, the Word is always the word of the other. If I can possess what I see (because I can reduce it conceptually to my own sameness), the Word comes always from beyond the limits of my possible domain. Without the Word, reality loses all focus and *telos*, for the visible does not allow for transcendence. It is by definition the immanent. What it reveals is not the other but, rather, only what we have made ourselves to be. The Word is the creative force in God's continuous work of creation. A transcendent force capable of bringing reality out of non existing things (*creatio ex nihilo*)¹⁰. If reality becomes aimless without the Word, it is the presence of the Word that attributes finality to reality, because, in the presence of the Word, reality itself is being constituted, restored, and created.

It is the epiphanic presence of the Word, as transcendence in immanence, that attributes to reality a sacramental character. It is in this sense that we can affirm God's ubiquity in creation itself. This affirmation is not deduced from a capability of "seeing" beyond the visible, but, precisely, because the visible becomes transparent. In being transparent it does not, strictly speaking, have a beyond! The visible does not, by its sacramental character, gain a magic force. The transparency of nature is in fact its own mirroring transparency effect through which we are sent back to the depths of our own existence, which in Luther's excentric anthropology is outside us. Nature loses, therefore, its own pretensions of otherness. And this is the same as saying that we lose our illusion of being strange to na-

10 It is important to remember that the origin of this concept, in 2 Macc 7, is the experience of evil; it is a response to the theodicy question and not a cosmogonic argument.

ture in recognizing ourselves as strange to God. This lies at the core of the *finitum capax infiniti*, for the infinite is never attainable, but always present in the mirroring transparency of the visible.

Luther defines this sacramental or mysterious character of God's ubiquitous presence through Christ in the context of his discussion of the three modes of Christ's presence¹¹ of which the third mode presents him "as near in all creatures as God is immanent in them." Precisely this argument of Luther's is quoted in the Formula of Concord to support the position that affirms at once the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, and the distinction between a sacrament *stricto sensu* and the affirmation that all of creation entails God's masked presence¹². What distinguishes the sacramental or mysterious character of God's presence in creation from the proper sacraments for the authors of the Formula of Concord is not the combination of element and Word, but its use (*usus*) in the ritual tradition instituted by Christ.¹³ Nature entails the continuous interrelatedness of Word and creature.

The word can only be the way in which otherness comes to me if I have accepted to take the visible for what it is. The theologian, said Luther in reference to the theology of the cross, "names things as they are."¹⁴ To ignore the visible or to flee from it in the search for the pure Word is to take the cross out of this world (something like the satirical paintings of the crucified Jesus in the paintings of Salvador Dali). This is but another version of the theology of glory with the difference that the one Luther criticized took the visible as a mediation to the invisible, while here there is a direct or immediate leap into the invisible, not realizing that the invisible — encompassed in the visible — is the very transparency of the visible.

Suffering, the unbearable sight of the visible, makes this visible transparent when the suffering seen is the suffering of which the human, *qua* human, knows itself to be an active agent. In Luther there is no ontological distinction between natural evil, and human evil. The cross of Christ as the archetypal shape suffering takes in the Christian story (the suffering of God's own self) manifests the *Deus revelatus* when it is known to be caused by the evil powers engendered in the human heart without appeal (*non posse non peccare*). The confession of the Centurion in Mark 15 is of such theological significance not because he knew the deeds or the teachings of Jesus, but because he knew himself to be part of those who directly

11 WA 26, pp. 335ff. This point is elaborated in the article by N H Gregersen in this collection.

12 T G Tappert (ed.), *Book of Concord*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1959, pp. 584-587.

13 I owe to P Hefner this insight for distinguishing a sacramental/ mysterious character from a sacrament proper.

14 Theologus crucis dicit id, quod res est. WA 1.354, pp. 21f.

posed suffering. Seeing himself in that mask it became for him that "mirroring transparency" into his own condition.

In the cross of Christ general and particular revelation meet each other, for God's creativity is witnessed in its annihilating force. Therefore, the cross is the material criterion by which the visible becomes constitutive for the knowledge of God, as much as the theology of creation (creation out of nothing/evil) establishes the formal criterion for the recognition of the visibility of the cross and the suffering in the world. Through the theology of creation the cross becomes "essentially identical" (R Prenter) with the suffering in and of the world. Through the theology of the cross the suffering in and of the world is recognized as the *locus* of God's creative work.

The suffering of nature (human included) assumes a privileged sacramental character not in and of itself, but because in it and through it, divine creativity manifests itself. The primacy of the word in God's creative redemption is for humans only a passive primacy that allows them to stand and behold suffering for what it is. On the human side, the response is one of action, the practice of giving glory to whom glory is due. The work is not meritorious precisely when and because it assumes this doxological character¹⁵. This practice is not done by the redemptive merit of the work accomplished, but because it is the only way to express our confession of sin, the human sin through which evil insinuates itself into nature (human nature included).

IV.

From here we can understand that for Luther the care and concern for nature are the response to the belief that God is the cause and source of all creatures. Humans are the poets of a medieval carnival creating masks through which we protect ourselves from the terrible sight of the abyss, the vision of the *Deus nudus*, the *horror vacui*. Therefore, ecological responsibility is neither a mystical nor a romantic response to the positive goodness of creation, nor a conformity to a natural law, but a doxological act of repentance and renewal out of the depth and the void that emerges from the clefts of a broken mask. We should not fear that nature has become artificial (K Marx). We should fear a view of nature, bucolic or scientific, which protects us from the experience of suffering and of the cross. Far from a naive view of nature or from the modern divorce between *homo* and *natura*, Luther's theology provides for criteria to face evil in nature and society: the

15 See CA XX: "It is also taught among us that good works should and must be done, not that we are to rely on them to earn grace but that we may do God's will and glorify him."

visibility of suffering in the silence of the innocent is what opens the space in which the creative Word resonates evoking our practical response. Every vocation is a stewardship in and through (and not for and to) God's creation. The focus of the ecological responsibility is not in the preservation or protection of nature, but in the knowledge we have for the power we exert in and through it.

As I have tried to show, the problem of Luther's theology for contemporary appropriation is not linked to the supposed incoherence in relating special and general revelation. The problem lies in the fact that, while Luther advanced far beyond the medieval understanding of nature, he remained medieval in his understanding of social institutions (*ecclesia, politia, oeconomia*). The anthropological reductionism in Luther's equation of sin and redemption fails to comprehend sin and evil in their structural dimensions. *Addito salis grano*, nature was for him artificial, but the institutions were natural. The nature we see is not the creation we believe but the production of our own knowledge and power. The inability to recognize that this knowledge and power consubstantiates itself in institutions and social structures, and is not only a direct expression of our individual sin, is the missing connection in Luther's theology. In this sense E Troeltsch was right to recognize the medieval character of Luther's social thinking, even if he has gone far beyond medieval constraints in his concept of revelation where the theology of the cross and creation theology meet.

SACRAMENTS AND CREATION

Scott S Ickert

The 1990 Assembly Message at Curitiba linked sacraments and care for God's creation. We shall examine this relationship from the perspective of Luther's definition. "A sacrament," he said, "must have two things for sure, God's Word and the external sign that has been duly instituted."¹

I. External sign

First we consider the external sign as a particular aspect of created reality, which a sacrament by definition requires. While Luther denied that grace perfects nature, as many taught, he did insist that nature provides the necessary means of grace. God the Holy Spirit comes through these means to work faith (CA V). As Tertullian (c.160-c.225), said about baptism: "water alone — always a perfect, gladsome, simple material substance, pure in itself — supplied a worthy vehicle to God."² For without such created things as water, bread and wine, together with the Word, there can be no sacraments. Without sacraments there is no church, no trustworthy saving grace, no discernable presence of the Triune God.

God's Spirit, therefore, is not a disembodied reality, for indeed, the sacraments also relate the *history* of Israel's election culminating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This history qualifies the external sign. Sacraments, therefore, encompass certain created realities specific to a particular story of death and resurrection. The Creator of heaven and earth is none other than Israel's liberator from her Egyptian bondage (Ps 135:7-9) and Jesus' deliverer from death (2 Cor 4:6). Speculation about a timeless nature deity is excluded from the start (cf. Judg 2:11-15; Gal 4:3-9), for the

1 LW. 36.303; WA 11.454, pp. 22-24.

2 *De baptismo* 3. cf. *ibid.*: "the material substance which governs terrestrial life acts as agent likewise in the celestial." See also 9.

biblical God is defined by historical particularity. He alone is the "living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them" (Acts 14:15). This narrative determines the meaning and purpose of creation, not vice versa. Hence water, as Luther says in his baptismal "flood prayer," is the medium of creation and deluge, the perilous and life-giving water of the Exodus, the water with which Jesus was baptized by John. The meal of bread and wine, offered in remembrance and hope, is a thanksgiving recalling the Passover and Exodus, Jesus' meal fellowship "on the night when he was betrayed" (1 Cor 11:23) and which continues in "the spirit of our Lord and of his resurrection" (cf. Lk 24:28-31) as a foretaste of "the great and promised feast."

Thus, God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is neither incorporeal nor immutable. The economy of salvation, comprehended in the Trinitarian life of God, is the focal point of this reality, which the sacraments confirm and mediate. God loves the world he created so much as to enter into it unreservedly, assuming in the Son the world's fallenness and its "flesh" (cf. Gal 3:13); God, in return, bestows new life and salvation in Christ, pouring out his Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28; cf. Acts 2). Luther described this encounter between Christ as the human soul as a "joyous exchange" (*fröhlicher Wechsel*).³ Just as all human history attains its fulfillment in the story of the crucified "King of the Jews," so also do the sacramental elements signal creation's final redemption in him who is the "Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev 21:6). Thus the world does not exist in and for itself. It receives its life and attains its destiny only in the Trinitarian life of God. Christ is "the first born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth ... all things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:15-16). In Christ God reconciles the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19) as the Spirit gives life to our mortal bodies (Rom 8:11). Water's properties, therefore, are acknowledged universally; but add Word and faith and water becomes the element of death and resurrection, the new and final reality to which Israel and the church bear witness in the power of the Spirit. The eucharistic meal of bread and wine not only reminds us of our dependence on the fruits of the earth and the benefits of meal fellowship; it is our participation through the Spirit in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16), who reconciles all things, "whether on earth or in heaven," to himself (Col 1:20). As Irenaeus (c.130-c.200) said:

As we as His members, we are also nourished by means of the creation (and He Himself grants the creation to us, for He causes His sun to rise, and sends rain when He wills). He has acknowledged the cup (which is a part of the creation) as His own blood, from which He bedews our blood; and the bread (also a part of the creation) He has established as His own body, from which He gives increase to our bodies.⁴

3 WA 7.25, p. 34. cf. LW 31.351.

Thus if temporal and corporeal sacraments mediate the saving presence of Israel's God, then one can assert that outward, external, created elements maintain a certain priority even with respect to the Spirit.

Now when God sends forth his holy gospel he deals with us in a twofold manner, first outwardly, then inwardly. Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through material signs, that is, baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly he deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts. But whatever their measure or order the outward factors should and must precede. The inward experience follows and is effected by the outward. God has determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward.⁵

In this sense Luther also speaks of the one sacrament, which is Christ himself (cf. 1 Tim 3:16),⁶ the quintessential "outward factor" and *sine qua non*. Jesus is more than a symbol of divine presence, for "apart from Christ there is simply no God or Godhead at all."⁷ This excludes the possibility that the Son was created and is thus something less than fully God, as the ancient Arians held, for in Jesus and the Spirit we meet both Creator and Redeemer. The Triune God thus maintains his sovereignty over the creation he enters into so fully and completely.

But God's sovereignty is not circumscribed by Jesus' humanity. For Jesus the man reigns as God. The incarnation is not provisional; it endures. Ascended to the right hand of the Father, Jesus is Lord of all things and fills all things not only in his divinity, but also according to his humanity.⁸ The sacraments emphatically proclaim this reality. "Wherever you place God

4 *Adversus omnes haereses* 5.2.2. On the relationship of both sacraments to both creation and salvation history, see also Pseudo-Augustine, *Sermon Deus* 6, in Daniel J. Sheerin, ed., *The Eucharist, Message of the Fathers of the Church* 7 (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1986) pp. 105-106: "Recall that this creature [wheat] was formerly in the field, how the earth bore it, how the rain nurtured it and brought it to the mature ear, and how afterwards the industry of man carried it to the threshing-floor, threshed it, winnowed it, stored it, brought it out, milled it, added water, baked it, and at length turned it into bread. Also recall yourselves. You did not exist, and you were created. You were brought to the threshing-floor of the Lord and threshed by the labors of oxen, that is to say of the heralds of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:9ff.). When you were put off as catechumens, you were being stored in the granary. You handed in your names, and you began to be milled by the fasts and the exorcisms. Afterwards you came to the water and you were moistened and made a unity. With the onset of the heat of the Holy Spirit you were baked, and you became the Lord's bread."

5 LW 40.146; WA 18.136, pp. 9-16. See also LW 37.95; WA 23.193 pp. 31-33: "The Spirit cannot be with us except in material and physical things such as the Word, water, and Christ's body and in his saints on earth." Cf. LW 26.73; WA 40.1.142, pp. 14-22.

6 LW 36.18, pp. 93-94; WA 6.501, 37; pp. 551, 19, 36-37.

7 LW 37.61; WA 23.139, pp. 28-29. cf. LW 1.58; WA 42.44, pp. 8-9: "the Father is not known except in the Son and through the Holy Spirit."

8 LW 36.342; WA 19.491, pp. 17-20.

for me," Luther said, "you must also place the humanity for me. They simply will not let themselves be separated and divided from each other."⁹ "If you can say, 'Here is God,' then you must also say, 'Christ the man is present too.'"¹⁰

The God to whom we appeal in faith, therefore, is not a naked First Cause, an evanescent spirit beyond time and space or buried within our individual or collective souls. He is precisely the Triune God of a particular narrative, who created heaven and earth, elected Israel, and became incarnate in the one baptized by John and pilloried for eating with tax collectors and sinners. He is the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18) in whom God is working through the power of the Spirit in Word and sacrament to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, to himself (Col 1:20). We cannot bypass the outward things which God has chosen, the sacramental elements and the specific historical narrative of a particular person, and hope to encounter the living God.

To renounce God's creation in otherworldly disdain or selfish unconcern, then, is not only to belittle the means of grace; but by disparaging the incarnation and passion of Israel's Christ, to repudiate the Triune God. The sacraments, in their outwardness and historical particularity, remind us of the fundamental and eternal connection between God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the world he created and comes to redeem.

II. God's Word

Without God's Word attached to the external signs, the sacraments — indeed, Christ himself! — are of no avail. "Even if Christ were given for us and crucified a thousand times," Luther said, "it would be all in vain if the Word of God were absent."¹¹ Indeed, the Word reveals the hidden intention of creation, whereby God "created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us."¹² The sacraments, by anchoring faith in the Word made flesh, direct us toward the world as the arena and object of salvation. Just as the Word of God hallows the sacramental elements, so the Word made flesh hallows the elements of creation as the objects of the Triune God's eternal love, benediction and grace.

9 LW 37.219; WA 26.333, pp. 6-8.

10 LW 37.218; WA 26.332, pp. 31-32.

11 LW 40.213; WA 18.202, pp. 38-39.

12 *Large Catechism*. See *The Book of Concord*, ed. and trans. T. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959) p. 419.

Command

Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," (Matt 28:19); and, with regard to meal fellowship, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24). These commands are clear and unmistakable. The injunction to use created objects, which together with the Word communicate the fullness of God's grace, has implications for how Christians respond to what one might call the "original" command to "fill the earth and subdue it" and to exercise "dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen 1:28).

Mention might be made of two additional commands, one scriptural, the other liturgical: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith," (Col 2:6-7); and the injunction to the eucharistic community to go in peace and serve the Lord. The subduer of the earth is one who lives in Christ and serves him. Hence the commands to have dominion, to baptize and give thanks, to live in and to serve Christ, are related at the deepest possible level; and it is precisely the sacraments which demonstrate their abiding interrelationship. If created objects thus mediate the saving presence of Christ through the power of the Spirit, then dominion, far from granting independence *from* the Creator, represents a freedom *for* a responsible participation in the Creator's handiwork. The creature exercises dominion *within* the context of the Creator's intention and plan of redemption in Christ as guaranteed by the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 1:19-22).

The essentially Trinitarian structure, language and character of Christian faith, therefore, requires sacraments. For God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, cannot be conceived of apart from Israel, Exodus, crib, cross, Pentecost, water, bread and wine. In the sacraments one participates necessarily, through faith and hope, in creation's and Israel's complete and final redemption, accomplished through the power of the Spirit, the same Spirit who at creation moved over the face of the waters (Gen 1:2) and raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 8:11). The Trinity thus relates to the one God, "the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6). Thus there is also one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope that belongs to our call (Eph 4:4-5; cf. 1 Cor 12:13). That God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is one, therefore, means that he has a body. The sacraments make us one body with him (1 Cor 10:16-17).

Being in the body of Christ thus means to take up one's cross in obedience to the Father under the guidance of the Spirit. That is why those who are in Christ are servants of one another and stewards of God's creation (cf. 1 Pet 4:10). Just as the commands to use water, bread and wine are given for the sustenance of the community of faith, so the command to

subdue the earth and to have dominion over its creatures — to make use of nature's bounty — implies the maintenance and stewardship of that bounty, for God himself is at work in us, "both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). Hence for those who are led by the Spirit, subduing and exercising dominion do not give license to exploit the earth or to mistreat the earth's creatures. Just as Paul warned against misuse of the eucharist — "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27) — so we may not profane the created order. The command to use does not give permission to abuse. We cannot turn God's gift of creation into our own private preserve, or transform what was given by God's free grace into an opportunity for self-justification. To destroy, exploit or hoard what God has given and continues to provide out of his bountiful goodness is but a craven act of cynical unbelief, a denial of our humanity, a repudiation of our membership in the body of Christ and our new life in the Spirit.

Thus faith in Christ issues naturally in works of love. "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." (Eph 2:10). The whole created realm is open to our good works, which through the Spirit are shown to be the work of Christ. And so, our emergence out of the pure life-giving waters of baptism should lead directly to a faithful concern and care for the world's seas, rivers, lakes and aquifers; our participation in the eucharist should remind us of our dependence on and responsibility for the soil, water, air and labor which produce these gifts of life, the vehicles of God's Spirit.

God's Word and sacraments thus have an ethical dimension as they set the believer free in and for the world. Here one is free not to achieve oneself, but to forget about oneself in faith toward God and in loving service to the neighbor. Luther said:

A Christian lives not in himself but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.¹³

In faith and service the Christian is free to concentrate precisely on that which stands over against himself/herself, on the Word and sacramental elements, and on the neighbor. The one who has been commanded to subdue the earth has been liberated through the power of the Spirit to exercise her freedom in loving service to care for all that God has created and

13 LW. 31.371; WA 7.69, pp. 12-15.

promises to redeem. Care for the environment is an act of loving, selfless service to the neighbor, which, in the context of faith, is our freedom as well as God's command.

Promise

Our several references to faith and freedom already have brought us into the realm of God's promise. Here too, according to Luther, word and outward sign belong together: "in every promise of God two things are presented to us, the word and the sign, so that we are to understand the word to be the testament, but the sign to be the sacrament."¹⁴ As Word and sign (sacrament) belong together, so does God's promise pertain directly to the created order. God does not assure an escape from creation; rather, Christ works through the Spirit to bring about its restoration and renewal. In him all things in heaven and on earth will be made new (Rev 21:1, 5). "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: ...that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:1, 18). This hope may be interpreted in terms of Isaiah 11:6-9 where all of God's creatures, animal and human, predator and prey, dwell together in harmony: "They will not hurt or destroy...for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (vs. 9). Thus the vision of salvation as reconciliation in the full knowledge of the Lord, i.e., in Christ, entails a new paradise, a new **creation**.¹⁵ Moreover, it is precisely this promise of the **new** creation, which gives meaning and substance to the original created order. Creation, in other words, is primarily and fundamentally an **eschatological** event.

The sacraments, therefore, by confirming and celebrating the eschatological basis of creation, impart to the baptized a new status as free creatures in a world which is in the process of a renewal brought about, not by the world's inherent capacity, but by the power of the Spirit as resurrection from the dead. "No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit." (Jn 3:5-6).

Thus we meet the contrast between flesh and spirit. This is not a conflict between material and non-material realities, for salvation does not eradicate the body — "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44) — nor is life in the Spirit a flight from the world, for faith, as we have said, liberates precisely for service in it. The flesh-spirit

14 LW 36.44; WA 6.518, pp. 14-15.

15 Thus the newly baptized often were given a mixture of milk and honey to drink. See, e.g., Tertullian, *De corona*, c. 3. See also the blessing of water, honey and milk from the Leonine Sacramentary and the letter of John the Deacon to Senarius, in E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1960, 1970) pp. 153-154; pp. 157-158.

contrast, therefore, highlights the distinction between what is the work of the Spirit and what is not. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom 8:11). The sacraments are thus spiritual realities in that they impart the saving presence of Christ; they are not antidotes to whatever is material and temporal. Thus the New Testament speaks of "the true bread from heaven" (Jn 6:32), and of "living water" (Jn 4:10; cf. 14).

What are the implications of this sacramentally embodied promise of redemption in the Spirit, then, for the created environment? First of all, we must keep in mind what Luther said of the sacramental elements, that they are "creatures, but creatures apprehended by the Word."¹⁶ The Word is decisive. The sacramental elements in particular, and therefore fallen creation in general, have no abiding significance, no meaning, no inherent value and no future apart from God's Word. By means of Word and sacrament, then, "we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen" (2 Cor 4:18). Those thus nourished know that though "the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God" (2 Cor 5:1). Only the Word can reveal the true significance, purpose and destiny of fallen creation, which "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Rom 8:19).

Our efforts to preserve and protect the natural environment as those who have been commanded to exercise dominion over it and thus to serve it, derive their motivation from God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth. For as our new life in Christ was created by water and the Spirit and as our faith is sustained through the fruits of the earth by means of which the Spirit preserves us as one body, so are we free to tend to the created environment whose true beauty, bounty and harmony is still to come in all its fullness. For in Christ the dawn of God's new creation already is breaking through the long night of decay, pollution and death.

Our efforts on behalf of God's created order must be seen as acts of faith in what God's Word and Spirit alone can bring about. Therefore, what we do to preserve and maintain the environment is a consequence of our faith in him who comes to make all things new and thus of our life in the Spirit, who works through created means — water, Word, bread and wine — to establish God's new creation in Christ. Thus cleansed and fed by God's Word and holy sacraments, and sustained by faith's promise of the new world to come, we may not only trust these words of Israel, but also live now by the hope they envision: "Blessed be his [God's] glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth!" (Ps 72:19).

16 LW 1.228; WA 42.170, pp. 23-24.

Under 1991/95 har hittills utgivits

TRO & TANKE

- 1991:1 Individ och kollektiv
- 1991:2 Gudstjänst- och andaktsbesök i Stor-Stockholm 1990 av Margareta Skog, Religion och Samhälle nr 63
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- 1991:4 Kyrkans dagis av Jørgen Straarup, Religion och Samhälle nr 65
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- 1991:6 Kyrkfolket och diakonin av Jonas Alwall och Karl Geyer, Religion och Samhälle nr 67
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- 1991:8 Mission och u-landsfrågor av Curt Dahlgren, Religion och Samhälle nr 68
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- 1991:9 Kom Heliga Ande - Canberra 1991, red Eva Block/Evah Ignestam
- 1991:10 Kyrksamheten i Svenska kyrkan 1990 med kommunuppgifter av Göran Gustafsson, Religion och Samhälle nr 70
Antalet medlemmar i valda samfund 1975-1991 av Margareta Skog, Religion och Samhälle nr 71
Gudstjänstbesök och livsriter i Svenska kyrkan under 1980-talet av Curt Dahlgren, Religion och Samhälle nr 72
- 1992:1 Om tolkning II. Att förstå av Eberhard Herrmann
- 1992:2 Kvinnor och män som bibelläsare av Eva M Hamberg, Religion och Samhälle nr 73
- 1992:3 Religionsfrihet och folkkyrka, red Jørgen Straarup, Religion och Samhälle nr 74
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Gudstjänst- och andaktsbesök i Jönköping ett veckoslut i november 1991 av Göran Åberg, Religion och Samhälle nr 80
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- 1992:12 Perspektiv på Svenska kyrkans statistik 1991, Religion och Samhälle nr 82
- 1993:1 Hus med dubbel ingång av Sten M Philipson

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- 1993:3 Fönster mot forskningen. Sammanfattningar av svenska doktorsavhandlingar 1989-1991 med teologisk anknytning
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- Frikyrkofolket och ekumeniken av Irving Palm, Religion och Samhälle nr 86
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- 1995:3 Om tolkning IV. Myt-historia- verklighet
- 1995:4 Gregorianik (Svenskt Gudstjänstliv årg 70)
- 1995:5 Concern for Creation, ed Viggo Mortensen

TRO & TANKE/Supplement

- 1/1993 Arbeta med beaktelsen (Tro förr och nu)
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- 3/1993 Teologi och samhälle (Kyrka och samhälle)
- 4/1993 Härlig är jorden (Tro förr och nu) av Gert Nilsson
- 5/1993 "våra pinade bröder av Israels stam" (Tro förr och nu) av Anders Jarlert
- 6/1993 Rättvisa, fred och skapelsens integritet (Internationella frågor)
- 1/1994 Folk och kyrka i Kalmar (Kyrka och samhälle)
- 2/1994 Svenska kyrkan i det nya Europa (Internationella frågor)
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- 5/1995 Spånor från det teologiska verkstadsgolvet. Föreläsningsserie vid Svenska kyrkans forskningsråd, våren 1995 (Kyrka och samhälle)
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Svenska kyrkans församlingsnämnd

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Bishop, priest and deacon in the Church of Sweden. A letter from the bishops concerning the ministry of the Church

De kyrkliga handlingarna i mötet med invandrare. Ett pastoralt brev från Svenska kyrkans biskopar

Rika och fattiga. Ett brev från Svenska kyrkans biskopar om rättfärdighet och moral i global ekonomi

Att bli präst i Svenska kyrkan. Biskopsmötet i samverkan med Svenska kyrkans utbildningsnämnd.

Svenska kyrkans utredningar

1994:1 För att tjäna. En studie av diakoniuppfattningar hos kyrkliga befattningshavare. Anders Bäckström m fl. Diakonistiftelsen Samariterhemmet

1994:2 Utkast till kyrkoordning m.m. för Svenska kyrkan - utarbetat i anslutning till Kyrkoberedningens betänkande (SOU 1994:42) Staten och trossamfunden

1994:3 Behov och prioriteringar av befattningar och verksamhet i Svenska kyrkans församlingar i dag och i framtiden. Luleå stift och Svenska kyrkans utbildningsnämnd

1994:4 Kyrkofullmäktigevalen. Problem och möjligheter. Betänkande avgivet av Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelses utredning rörande valdeltagandet i kyrkofullmäktigevalen

1994:5 Svenska kyrkans kulturarbete - en rapport om det rikskyrkliga arbetet med kulturfrågor. Svenska kyrkans stiftelse för rikskyrklig verksamhet

1994:6 Utredning av det hittillsvarande arbetet i Svenska kyrkans forskningsråd. Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse

1994:7 Lokalt ekumeniskt arbete ur Svenska kyrkans perspektiv. "Allt börjar på lokalplanet". Svenska kyrkans sekretariat för teologi och ekumenik

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1994:9 Utredning om vissa frågor rörande prästtjänster m.m. Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse

1995:1 Diakonens ämbete. Betänkande av den av Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse tillsatta utredningen om diakonatet. Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse

Svenska kyrkans forskningsråd började sin verksamhet 1989. Det har till uppgift att främja vetenskaplig forskning inom det teologiska forskningsområdet och inom andra områden som är väsentliga för kyrkan genom att

- * inventera behov av forskning
- * initiera och prioritera forskningsprojekt
- * fördela anslag till forskningsprojekt
- * informera om forskning och forskningsresultat.

Möjligheterna att dela ut anslag är relativt begränsade - och den ojämförligt största delen av arbetet är knuten till forskningssekreteriatet, som är beläget i Uppsala. Det har akademisk forskningskompetens inom de flesta av de religionsvetenskapliga områdena.

How are we to understand the basic Christian teaching on creation in the light of the ecological threats to nature? This is the starting-point of the reflections contained in this publication. Relationship, interdependence and interrelatedness become key-words in this attempt to formulate a Lutheran theology of creation.

This book is the result of a study process initiated by the Lutheran World Federation. As a communion of Lutheran churches, the Federation is determined to contribute the gifts and talents entrusted to it, including the resources of the confessional heritage, in order to address the present crisis which threatens the future of the earth and its people.

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